

THE DAY BEFORE YESTERDAY

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

Prose

THE GHOST SHIP, AND OTHER
STORIES

[*Third Impression*]

Verse

POEMS AND SONGS (1ST SERIES)

. .

[*Second Impression*]

POEMS AND SONGS (2ND SERIES)

LONDON: T. FISHER UNWIN

THE DAY BEFORE
YESTERDAY · BY
RICHARD MIDDLETON

T. FISHER UNWIN
LONDON: ADELPHI TERRACE
LEIPSIC: INSELSTRASSE 20

1912

(All rights reserved.)

Thanks are due to the Editors of *The Academy*,
Vanity Fair, and *The Pall Mall Gazette* for
permission to reprint the greater part of the
work in this volume.

CONTENTS

	PAGE
AN ENCHANTED PLACE	1
A RAILWAY JOURNEY	8
THE MAGIC POGL	16
THE STORY-TELLER	25
ADMIRALS ALL	33
A REPERTORY THEATRE	41
CHILDREN AND THE SPRING	49
ON NURSERY CUPBOARDS	56
THE FAT MAN	63
CAROL SINGERS	70
THE MAGIC CARPET	77
STAGE CHILDREN	84
OXFORD AND CAMBRIDGE	92
HAROLD	99
ON DIGGING HOLES	105

	PAGE
REAL CRICKET	112
THE BOY IN THE GARDEN	119
CHILDREN AND THE SEA	130
ON GOING TO BED	137
STREET ORGANS	144
A SECRET SOCIETY	152
THE PRICE OF PEACE	161
ON CHILDREN'S GARDENS	167
A DISTINGUISHED GUEST	174
ON PIRATES	182
THE FLÛTE PLAYER	189
THE WOOL-GATHERER	197
THE PERIL OF THE FAIRIES	205
DRURY LANE AND THE CHILDREN	212
CHILDREN'S DRAMA	217
CHILDHOOD IN RETROSPECT	225
THE FOLLY OF EDUCATION	231
ON COMMON SENSE	239

The Day Before Yesterday

AN ENCHANTED PLACE

WHEN elder brothers insisted on their rights with undue harshness, or when the grown-up people descended from Olympus with a tiresome tale of broken furniture and torn clothes, the groundlings of the schoolroom went into retreat. In summer-time this was an easy matter; once fairly escaped into the garden, any climbable tree or shady shrub provided us with a hermitage. There was a hollow tree-stump full of exciting insects and pleasant earthy smells that never failed us, or, for wet days, the tool-shed, with its armoury of weapons with which, in imagination, we would repel the attacks of hostile forces. But in the game that was our childhood, the garden was out of bounds in winter-time, and we had to seek other

2 THE DAY BEFORE YESTERDAY

lairs. Behind the schoolroom piano there was a three-cornered refuge that served very well for momentary sulks or sudden alarms. It was possible to lie in ambush there, at peace with our grievances, until life took a turn for the better and tempted us forth again into the active world.

But when the hour was tragic and we felt the need for a hiding-place more remote, we took our troubles, not without a recurring thrill, to that enchanted place which our elders contemptuously called the "mouse-cupboard." This was a low cupboard that ran the whole length of the big attic under the slope of the roof, and here the aggrieved spirit of childhood could find solitude and darkness in which to scheme deeds of revenge and actions of a wonderful magnanimity turn by turn. Luckily our shelter did not appeal to the utilitarian minds of the grown-up folk or to those members of the younger generation who were beginning to trouble about their clothes. You had to enter it on your hands and knees; it was dusty, and the mice obstinately disputed our possession. On the inner walls the plaster

seemed to be oozing between the rough laths, and through little chinks and crannies in the tiles overhead our eyes could see the sky. But our imaginations soon altered these trivial blemishes. As a cave the mouse-cupboard had a very interesting history. As soon as the smugglers had left it, it passed successively through the hands of Aladdin, Robinson Crusoe, Ben Gunn, and Tom Sawyer, and gave satisfaction to them all, and it would no doubt have had many other tenants if some one had not discovered that it was like the cabin of a ship. From that hour its position in our world was assured.

For sooner or later our dreams always returned to the sea—not, be it said, to the polite and civilised sea of the summer holidays; but to that sea on whose foam there open magic casements, and by whose crimson tide the ships of Captain Avery and Captain Bartholomew Roberts keep faithful tryst with the *Flying Dutchman*. It needed no very solid vessel to carry our hearts to those enchanted waters—a paper boat floating in a saucer served well enough

4 THE DAY BEFORE YESTERDAY

if the wind was propitious—so the fact that our cabin lacked portholes and was of an unusual shape did not trouble us. We could hear the water bubbling against the ship's side in a neighbouring cistern, and often enough the wind moaned and whistled overhead. We had our lockers, our sleeping-berths, and our cabin-table, and at one end of the cabin was hung a rusty old cutlass full of notches; we would have hated any one who had sought to disturb our illusion that these notches had been made in battle. When we were stowaways even the mice were of service to us, for we gave them a full roving commission as savage rats, and trembled when we heard them scampering among the cargo.

But though we cut the figure of an old admiral out of a Christmas number, and chased slavers with Kingston very happily for a while, the vessel did not really come into her own until we turned pirates and hoisted the "Jolly Roger" off the coast of Malabar. Then, by the light of guttering candles, the mice witnessed some strange sights. If any of us had any money we

would carouse terribly, drinking ginger-beer like water, and afterwards water out of the ginger-beer bottles, which still retained a faint magic. Jam has been eaten without bread on board the *Black Margaret*, and when we fell across a merchantman laden with a valuable consignment of dried apple-rings—tough fare but interesting—and the savoury sugar out of candied peel, there were boisterous times in her dim cabin. We would sing what we imagined to be sea chanties in a doleful voice, and prepare our boarding-pikes for the next adventure, though we had no clear idea what they really were.

And when we grew weary of draining rum-kegs and counting the pieces of eight, our life at sea knew quieter though no less enjoyable hours. It was pleasant to lie still after the fever of battle and watch the flickering candles with drowsy eyes. Surely the last word has not been said on the charm of candle-light; we liked little candles—dumpy sixteens they were perhaps—and as we lay they would spread among us their attendant shadows. Beneath us the water chuckled

restlessly, and sometimes we heard the feet of the watch on deck overhead, and now and again the clanging of the great bell. In such an hour it was not difficult to picture the luminous tropic seas through which the *Black Margaret* was making her way. The skies of irradiant stars, the desert islands like baskets of glowing flowers, and the thousand marvels of the enchanted ocean—we saw them one and all.

It was strange to leave this place of shadows and silences and hour-long dreams to play a humble part in a noisy, gas-lit world that had not known these wonders; but there were consolations. Elder brothers might prevail in argument by methods that seemed unfair, but, beneath a baffled exterior, we could conceal a sublime pity for their unadventurous lives. Governesses might criticise our dusty clothes with wearisome eloquence, but the recollection that women were not allowed on board the *Black Margaret* helped us to remain conventionally polite. Like the gentleman in Mr. Wells's story, we knew that there were better dreams, and the knowledge raised us for a while

above the trivial passions of our environment.

We were not the only children who had found the mouse-cupboard a place of enchantment, for when we explored it first we discovered a handful of wooden beads carefully hidden in a cranny in the wall. These breathed of the nursery rather than of the schoolroom, and yet, perhaps, those forgotten children had known what we knew, and our songs of the sea stirred only familiar echoes. It is likely enough that to-day other children have inherited our dreams, and that other hands steer the *Black Margaret* under approving stars. If this indeed be so, they are in our debt, for in one of our hiding-places we left the "Count of Monte Cristo" in English, rare treasure-trove for any proper boy. If this should ever meet his eyes he will understand.

A RAILWAY JOURNEY

I SUPPOSE that when little boys made their journeys by coach with David Copperfield or Tom Brown and his pea-shooting comrades they did in truth find adventure easier to achieve than we who were born in an age of railways. But though the rarer joys of far travel by road were denied us, it did not need Mr. Rudyard Kipling in a didactic mood to convince us that there was plenty of romance in railway journeys if you approached them in the right spirit. We were as fond of playing at trains as most small boys, and a stationary engine with the light of the furnace glowing on the grim face of the driver was a disquieting feature of all my nightmares. So when the grown-up people announced that one of us was to make a long journey young Ulysses became for the moment an envied and enchanted

figure. Our periodical excursions to London were well enough in their way ; noisy, jolly parties in reserved carriages to pantomimes and the Lord Mayor's Show, or matter-of-fact visits to the dentist or the shops. But we all knew the features of the landscape on the way to London by heart, and it was the thought of voyaging through the unknown that fired our lively blood, our hazy sense of geography enabling us to believe that all manner of marvels were to be seen by young eyes from English railway-carriages. Also we did not feel that we were real travellers until we had left all our own grown-ups behind, though in such circumstances we had to put up with the indignity of being confided to the care of the guard. Until children have votes they will continue to suffer from such slights as this !

One morning in early spring I left London for the north. The adult who saw me off performed his task on the whole very well. True, he introduced me to the guard, a bearded and sinister man ; but, on the other hand, he realised the importance of my having a corner seat, and only once or twice

10 THE DAY BEFORE YESTERDAY

committed the error of treating me, as if I were a parcel. For my part, I was at pains to conceal my excitement beneath the mannerisms of an experienced traveller. I put the window up and down several times and read aloud all the notices concerning luncheon-baskets and danger-signals. Then my companion shook hands with me in a sensible, manly fashion, and the train started. I sat back and examined my fellow-travellers, and found them rather disappointing. There were three ladies, manifestly of the aunt kind, and a stiff, well-behaved little girl who might have stepped out of one of my sister's story-books. She was reading a book without pictures, and when I turned over the pages of my magazines she displayed no interest in them whatever. I could never read in the train, so, with a tentative effort at good manners, I pushed them towards her, but she shook her head; to show her that I did not think this was a snub I pulled out my packet of sandwiches and had my lunch. After that I played with the blind, which worked with a spring, until one of the aunts told me not to fidget, although she was no

aunt of mine. Then I looked out of the window, a prey to voiceless wrath.

By now we had left London far behind, and when I had finished composing imaginary retorts to the unscrupulous aunt I was quite content to see the wonders of the world flit by. There were hills and valleys decked with romantic woods and set with fascinating and secretive ponds. To my eyes the hills were mountains and the valleys perilous hollows, the accustomed lairs of tremendous dragons. I saw little thatched houses wherein swart witches awaited the coming of Hansel and Gretel, and fairy children waved to me from cottage gardens and the gates of level-crossings, greetings which I dutifully returned until the aunt made me pull up the window. After a while a change came over the scenery. The placid greens and browns of the countryside blossomed to gold and purple and crimson. I saw a roc float across the arching sky on sluggish wings, and my eyes were delighted with visions of deserts and mosques and palm-trees. That my fellow-passengers would not raise their heads to behold

12 THE DAY BEFORE YESTERDAY

these marvels did not trouble me ; I beat on the window with delight, until, like little Billee in Thackeray's ballad, I saw Jerusalem and Madagascar and North and South Amerikee.

Then something surprising happened. I saw the earth leap up and invade the sky and the sky drop down and blot out the earth, and I felt as though my wings were broken. Then the sides of the carriage closed in and squeezed out the door like a pip out of an orange, until there was only a three-cornered gap left. The air was full of dust, and I sneezed again and again, but could not find my pocket-handkerchief. Presently a young man came and lifted me out through the hole, and seemed very surprised that I was not hurt. I realised that there had been an accident, for the train was broken into pieces and the permanent way was very untidy. Close at hand I saw the little girl sitting on a bank, and a man kneeling at her feet taking her boots off. I would have liked to speak to her, but I remembered how she had refused the offer of my magazines, and was afraid she would

snub me again. The place was very noisy, for people were calling out, and there was a great sound of steam. I noticed that everybody's face was very white, especially the guard's, which made his beard seem as black as soot. The young man took me by the hand and led me along the uneven ground, and there was so much to see that my feet kept stumbling over things, and he had to hold me up. On the way we passed the body of a man lying with a rug over his head. I knew that he was dead; but I had seen drunken men in the streets lie like that, and I could not help looking about for the policeman. Soon we came to a little station, and the platform was crowded with people who would not stand still, but walked round and round making noises. When I climbed up on the platform a woman caught hold of me and cried over me. One of her tears fell on my ear and tickled me; but she held me so tightly that I could not put up my hand to rub it. Her breath was hot on my head.

Then I heard a detested voice say, "Poor little boy, so tired!" and I shuddered back

14 THE DAY BEFORE YESTERDAY

into consciousness of the world that was least interesting of all the worlds I knew. I need not have opened my eyes to be sure that the aunts were at their fell work again, and that the little girl's snub nose was tilted to a patronising angel. Had I awakened a minute later she, too, would have joined in the auntish chorus of compassion for my weakness. As it was, I looked at her with drowsy pity, finding that she was one of those luckless infants who might as well stay at home for all the fun they get out of travelling. She knew no better than to scream when the train ran into a tunnel; what would she have done if she had seen my roc?

The train ran on and on, and still I throned it in my corner, awake or dreaming, indisputably master of all the things that counted. The three aunts faded into antimacassars; the little girl endured her uninteresting life and became an aunt and an antimacassar in her turn, and still I swung my legs in my corner seat, a boy-errant in the strange places of the world. I do not remember the name of the station at which the bearded guard 'ulti-

mately brought me out of my dreams. I do remember standing stiffly on the platform and deciding that I had been travelling night and day for three hundred years. When I communicated this fact to the relatives who met me they were strangely unimpressed; but I knew that when I returned home to my brothers they would display a decent interest in the story of my wanderings. After all, you can't expect grown-up people to understand everything!

THE MAGIC POOL

BEING born in a sceptical age, heirs of a world, that certainly took its Darwin too seriously, we children did not readily enlarge the circle of our supernatural acquaintances. There was the old witch who lived in the two-storied house beyond the hill, in whom *less discriminate eyes recognised only the* very respectable widow of an officer in the India Army. There was the ghost of the murdered shepherd-lad that haunted the ruined hut high up on the windy downs; on gusty nights we heard him piping shrilly to his phantom flocks, and sometimes their little bells seemed to greet us from the chorus of the storm. There was a little drowned kitten who mewed to us from the shadows of the rain-water cistern, and a small boy who cried about the garden in the autumn because he could not find his ball among the dead

leaves. • We had all heard the three last, and most of us had seen them at twilight-time, when ghosts pluck up their poor thin courage and take their walks abroad. As for the witch, we relied on our intuitions and gave her house a wide berth.

The credentials of these four unquiet spirits having been examined and found satisfactory, schoolroom opinion was against any addition to their number. We would not accept my younger brother's murderer carrying a sack or my little sister's procession of special tortoises, though we acknowledged that there was merit in them, regarded merely as artistic conceptions. Perhaps, subconsciously, we realised that to make the supernatural commonplace is also to make it ineffective, and that there is no dignity in a life jostled by spooks. At all events, we relied for our periodical panics on those which had received the official sanction, and on the terrifying monsters our imaginations had drawn from real life—burglars, lunatics, and drunken men.

It was therefore noteworthy that as soon as we discovered the pool in Hayward's

18 THE DAY BEFORE YESTERDAY

Wood we were all agreed that it was no ordinary sheet of water, but one of those enchanted pools which draw their waters from magic sources and are capable of throwing spells over mortals who approach them unwarily. And yet, though we felt instinctively that there was something queer about it, the pool in itself was not unattractive. Held, as it were, in a cup in the heart of the wood, it still contrived to win its share of sunshine through the branches above. On its surface the water-boatmen were ferrying cheerfully to and fro, while overhead the dragon-flies drove their gaudy monoplanes in ceaseless competition. All about the woods were gay with wild garlic and the little purple gloves that Nature provides for foxes, and through a natural alley we could see a golden meadow, where cups of cool butter were spread with lavish generosity to quench the parched tongues of bees. The mud that squelched under our feet as we stood on the brink seemed to be good, honest mud, and gave our boots the proper holiday finish. Nevertheless; we stared silently at the waters, half-expecting

to see them thicken and part in brown foam, to allow some red-mouthed prehistoric monster to rise oozily from his resting-place in the mud—some such mammoth as we had seen carved in stone on the borders of the lake at the Crystal Palace. But no monster appeared; only a rabbit sprang up suddenly on the far side of the pool, and, seeing we had no gun and no dog, limped off in a leisurely manner to the warren.

After a while we grew weary of our doubts, and, tacitly agreeing to pretend that it was only an ordinary pond, fell to paddling in the shallows with a good heart. The mud slid warmly through our toes, and the water lay round our calves like a tight string, but we were not changed, as we had half anticipated, into tadpoles or water-lilies. It was apparent that the magic was of a subtler kind than this, and we splashed about cheerfully until the inevitable happened and one of us went in up to his waist. Then we sat on the bank nursing our wet feet, and laughing at the victim as he ruefully wrung out his clothes. We were all of a nautical turn of mind, and we agreed that the pond would

20 THE DAY BEFORE YESTERDAY

serve very well for minor naval engagements, though it was too sheltered to provide enough wind for sailing-ships. Still, here we should at all events be secure from such a disaster as had recently overtaken my troopship *Dauntless*, which was cruising in calm weather on Pickhurst Pond when all of a sudden "a land breeze shook the shrouds and she was overset," and four-and-twenty good soldiers sank to the bottom like lead, which they were. Regarded merely as an attractive piece of water, the pool could not fail to be of service in our adventurous lives.

But all the time we felt in our hearts that it was something more, though we would have found it hard to give reasons for our conviction, for the pool seemed very well able to keep the secret of its enchantment. We did not even know whether it was the instrument of black magic or of white, whether its influence on human beings was amiable or malevolent. We only knew that it was under a spell, that beneath its reticent surface, that showed nothing more than the reflection of our own inquiring faces, lay hidden some part of that especial

magic that makes the dreams of young people as real as life, and contradicts the unlovely generalisations of disillusioned adults. All that was necessary was to find the key that would unlock the golden gates.

The brother who was nearest to me in terms of years found it two days later, and came to me breathlessly with the news. He had been reading a book of fairy stories, and had come upon the description of just such a magic pool as ours, even to the rabbit—who was, it seemed, a kind of advance-agent to the spirit of the pool. The rules were very clear. All you had to do was to go to the pool at midnight and wish aloud, and your wish would be granted. If you were greedy enough to wish more than once, you would be changed into a goldfish. My brother thought it would be rather jolly to be a goldfish, and so for a while did I; but on reflection we decided that if the one wish were carefully expended it might be more amusing to remain a boy.

It says something for our spirit of adventure that we did not even discuss the advisability of undertaking this lawless ex-

22 THE DAY BEFORE YESTERDAY

pedition. We were more engaged in rejoicing in anticipation over the discomfiture of our elder brothers and settling the difficult problem of what we should wish. My brother was all for seven-league boots and invisible caps and other conjuring tricks of a faëry character ; I had set my heart on money, more sovereigns than we could carry, and I finally brought my brother round to my point of view. After all, he could always buy the other things if he had enough money. It was agreed that he should wind up his birthday watch and that we should only pretend to go to bed, as we should have to start at half-past eleven. When planned by daylight the whole thing seemed absurdly easy.

We had no difficulty in getting out of the house when the time came, simply because this was not the sort of thing that the grown-up people expected us to do, but we found the world strangely altered. The familiar lanes had become rivers of changing shadows, the hedgerows were ambuscades of robbers, the tall trees were affronted giants. Fortunately, we were on very good

terms with the moon at the time, so when she made her periodical appearances from behind the scudding clouds she came as a friend. Nevertheless, when my hand accidentally touched my brother's in the dark it stayed there, and we were glad to walk along hand in hand, a situation which we would have thought deplorable for two fellows of our years by day. It seemed to me that my brother was breathing shortly and noisily as if he were excited, but presently the surprising thought came to me that it might be my own breathing that I heard. As we drew near to Hayward's Wood the moon retired behind a cloud, and stayed there. This was hardly friendly of her, for the wood was terribly dark, and the noise of our own stumblings made us pause in alarm again and again. When we stood still and listened all the trees seemed to be saying "Hush!"

Somehow we reached the pool at last, and stayed our steps on the bank expectantly. At first we could see nothing but shadows, but, after a while, we discovered that it was full of drowned stars, a little pale as though

24 THE DAY BEFORE YESTERDAY

the water had extinguished some of their fire. And then, as we wondered at this, the moon shone through the branches overhead and lit the wood with a cool and mysterious radiance that reminded me oddly of the transformation scene in our last pantomime. My brother pulled his watch out of his pocket, but his hand shook so that he could hardly tell the time. "Five minutes more," he whispered hoarsely. I tried to answer him, and found that I could not speak.

And then, as we waited breathlessly, we heard a noise among the undergrowth on the other side of the pool—a noise, it seemed, of footsteps, that grew louder and louder in our excited ears, till it was as if all the armies of the world were tramping through the wood. And then . . . and then . . .

When we stopped to get our breath half-way home we first discovered that neither of us had had presence of mind enough to wish. But we knew that there was no going back. We had had our chance, and missed it. But, even now, I do not doubt that it was a magic pool.

THE STORY-TELLER

HE changed with the seasons, and, like the seasons, was welcome in every mood. In spring he was forlorn and passionate in turn ; now fiercely eloquent, now tuneful with those little cheerful songs that seem in terms of human emotion to be the saddest of all. In summer he dreamed in sensuous and unambitious idleness, gladly conscious of the sunshine and warm winds and flower-smells, and using only languorous and gentle words. In autumn, with the dead leaves of the world about his feet, he became strangely hopeful and generous of glad promises of adventure and conquest. It seemed as though he found it easier to triumph when Nature had abdicated her jealous throne. But it was in the winter-time when he came into his own kingdom, and mastered his environment and his passions to make the most

26 THE DAY BEFORE YESTERDAY .

joyful songs. Then he would lie at full length on the hearthrug, and we children, sitting in a rapt circle, fantastically lit by the fire, would listen to his stories, and know that they were the authentic wisdom.

It was in vain that the grown-ups warned us, against the fascinations of his society, telling us that dreamers came to no good end in a practical world. As well might the townsfolk of Hamelin, in Brunswick, have ordered their children to turn a deaf ear to the tune of the Pied Piper. We had studied life from a practical point of view between our games, and found it unsatisfying; this man brought us something infinitely more desirable. He would come stepping with delicate feet, fearful of trampling on our own tender dreams, and he would tell us the enchanted stories that we had not heard since we were born. He told us the meaning of the stars and the significance of the sun and moon; and, listening to him, we remembered that we had known it all once before in another place. Sometimes even we would remind him of some trivial incident that he had

forgotten, and then he would look at us oddly and murmur sadly that he was getting very old. When the stories were over, and all the room was still ringing with beautiful echoes, he would stand erect and ask us fiercely whether we saw any straws in his hair. We would climb up him to look (for he was very tall), and when we told him that we could not find any he would say: "The day you see them there will be no more stories." We knew what the stories were worth to us, so we were always afraid of looking at his head for fear that we should see the straws and all our gladdest hours should be finished.

His voice was all the music extant, and it was only by recalling it that our young ears could find that there was beauty in fine singing and melodiousness in the chaunt of birds. Yet when his words were eloquent we forgot the voice and the speaker, content to sacrifice our critical individualities to his inspiration till we were no more than dim and silent figures in the background of his tale. It was only in winter-time that he achieved this supreme illusion ; perhaps the

28 THE DAY BEFORE YESTERDAY

firelight helped him, and the chill shadows of the world. In the summer his stories had the witchery of dreams ; their realism startled us, and yet we knew that they were not real. After listening to them through a hot afternoon we would stretch back into consciousness, as though we had been asleep ; his drowsy fancies lulled our personalities, but did not conquer them. The winter magic was of a rarer kind. Then even his silences became significant, for he brought us to so close an intimacy with his mind that his very thoughts seemed like words.

It is idle to expect a child to believe that every grown-up person was a child once upon a time, for it is not credible that they could have forgotten so much. But this man was a child both in feeling and in understanding. He knew the incidents that perplexed us in those nursery legends that have become classics, and sometimes it was his pleasure to tell them to us again, having regard to our wakeful sympathies. He was the friend of all the poor, lost creatures of romance—the giants whose humiliating lot it was to be defeated by any stripling lad,

the dragons whose flaming strength was a derision when opposed to virtue in armour. He shared our pity for Antæus and Caliban and Goliath of Gath, and even treated sorcerers and wicked kings with reasonable humanity. Somehow, though we felt that it was wicked, we could not help being sorry for people when they were punished very severely. The very ease with which giants could be outwitted suggested that the great simple fellows might prove amiable enough if they were kindly treated, while it was always possible that dragons might turn out to be bewitched princes, if only the beautiful princesses would kiss them instead of sending heroes to kill them unfairly, without giving them an opportunity of explaining their motives. Our story-teller understood our scruples and sympathised with them, and in his versions every one had a chance, whether they were heroes or no. Even the best children are sometimes cruel, but they are never half so pitiless as the writers of fairy-stories.

But better than any fairy-stories were the stories that he told us of our own lives,

30 THE DAY BEFORE YESTERDAY

which under his touch became the wonderful adventures which they really were. He showed us that it was marvellous to get out of bed in the morning, and marvellous to get into bed at night. He made us realise the imaginative value of common things, and the fun that could be derived even from the performance of duties, by aid of a little make-believe. The grown-up folk would probably have derided his system, but he made us tolerate our lessons, and endure the pangs of toothache with some degree of fortitude. He had a short way with the ugly bogles with which thoughtless nurses and chance echoes from the horrors columns of newspapers had peopled the shadows of our life. We were no longer afraid of the dark when he had told us how friendly it could be to the distressed. Hitherto we had vainly sought to find the colours and sounds of romance in life, and, failing, had been tempted to sum up the whole business as tedious. After he had shown us how to do it, it was easy to see that life itself was a story as romantic as we cared to make it. Our daily official walks became gallant ex-

peditions, and we approached arithmetic with a flaming sword.

Can any childhood ever have known a greater wizard than this? And yet since that state does not endure for ever, it must surely have happened to us to seek for straws in his towering head once too often, had not death taken our kindly enchanter from our company, and thus spared us the bitter discovery that the one man who reconciled us to life was considered rather more than eccentric by an obtuse world. It is true that we noticed that the grown-up people were apt to treat him sometimes as if he were one of us, but we felt that he merited this distinction, and did not find it strange. Nor did we wonder that he should tell stories aloud to himself lacking a wider audience, for we knew that if we had the power we should tell such stories to ourselves all day long. We did not only fail to realise that he was mad; we knew that he was the only reasonable creature of adult years who ever came near us. He understood us and paid us the supreme compliment of allowing us to understand him. The world called him

32 THE DAY BEFORE YESTERDAY

fantastic for actions that convinced us that he was wise, and, thanks to a fate that seemed at the time insensately cruel, the spell was never broken.

ADMIRALS ALL

WHEN the Christmas holidays are over, and pantomimes and parties are cleared away, there is usually a marked revival in a sport that has languished during those exciting weeks. A child who wished to play at boats, when the air was full of the smell of tangerine oranges and the glamour of the footlights, would not be tolerated in any decent schoolroom. But with the re-appearance of lessons there comes a sudden demand for walnut-shells and sealing-wax, and bath-night, a thing undesirable while the house is noisy with new tunes, becomes the cause of rivalry and passionate argument.

So at least it fell in the days when childhood was more than the kernel of an article. The first symptom of the new movement was an eager interest in dessert. We would entreat

34 THE DAY BEFORE YESTERDAY

the Olympians to forego nut-crackers and to use our new Christmas pocket-knives for the purpose of opening their walnuts, and we would regard the results with a keen and professional eye. Were they destined to be clippers, yachts notable in history, or mere utilitarian tubs to be laden with tipsy tin-soldiers and sunk ignominiously by brass cannon? We were all naval experts and our judgments were not often wrong. But even if a walnut-shell had the right racing lines, there remained the delicate operation of stepping the mast. The "blob" of sealing-wax had to be dropped in exactly the right place, and the whittled safety-match that served for a mast must be truly perpendicular or the craft would be lopsided. The paper sail was as large as safety would permit.

There followed regattas in a basin filled to the brim with water. The yachts raced from one side to the other, and some one, assumed neutral, blew with a level breath across the flood to supply the necessary wind. The reward of victory was a little coloured flag that was gummed to the sail of the

successful boat. On a memorable day my *Swallow* beat a hitherto undefeated champion in my eldest brother's *Irene*, a result the more astonishing that *Irene's* owner was himself filling the rôle of *Æolus*. I am glad to think it was *Irene* that was flung out of the window.

Apart from these classic contests there were secret trials and naval reviews in private waters, and that intimate kind of navigation that took place in one's bath. This last was spiced with an agreeable element of risk, for a rash movement would send the whole fleet to the bottom of the sea; but at the same time in no other way could an admiral have the elements so much under his control. Like Neptune, he could raise a storm at will, and when the ships had battled gallantly against terrible waves and icebergs of patent soap, a pair of pink feet would rise above the surface of the ocean; and the Fortunate Islands would greet the tired eyes of the mariners. It is a fine thing to sail about the world, but it is very good to be at home.

Later on, as the weather grew warmer, we

36 THE DAY BEFORE YESTERDAY

indulged in more adventurous, and let it be admitted, more enjoyable, sport. Walnut boats and paper junks ballasted with shot might be well enough for the cold months or wet afternoons, but when the summer called us out to play, our ambitious hearts desired weightier craft than these. Then the yachts that uncles had given us, which had been cruising peacefully on the playroom floor during the indoor weeks, were brought out and considered in their new aspect. There was always something at once thrilling and disappointing about these stately ships. The height of their masts, the intricacy of their rigging, and the little lines that marked the planks of their deck, filled us with pride, and made us seek the nearest pond with quick, elated steps. But these things might be as well admired indoors, and somehow these boats never sailed as well on any wakeful pond as they did on the waters of our dreams. There they were for ever tossing on the crests of enormous waves, and all night long their great masts went crashing by the board; but on Pickhurst Pond they behaved with a staid monotony,

and while we and the boats of our hands had as many moods as the spring, these official craft were content to perform their business of sailing with the conscientious precision of grown-up persons.

There was more to be said for the modest sort of boat you would buy for sixpence or a shilling. They had a useless mast and sail (the boat capsized if you set it), seats that were annoying but easily removed, and sometimes, as a crowning piece of Philistinism, oars! We would have scorned to give a moment's consideration to a rowing boat at any time. We wanted only craft that were fit to cruise with equal adroitness on boundless oceans and unhealthy tropic rivers, and, lacking a hold, where should we keep the rum and the pieces of eight? But if you threw away everything but the bare hull, and painted that black, you had a very sound basis for sensible boat-building. A tin railway carriage would make a cabin, a wooden brick the quarter-deck, and if you could find some lead for the keel you might give the vessel a real mast with which to strike the southern stars.

But, after all, the best boats were the boats we built entirely ourselves. Our favourite materials were corks, empty match-boxes, and such wood as lies within the seope of a pocket-knife, and we would drive tinctacks into the craft until it looked like a nursery cake, crowned with burnt currants. The resulting ships varied as to shape and size, but could be trusted to conduct themselves in the water with a charming eccentricity. Sometimes they seemed to skim the waves like birds, sometimes the water leaped through them with a laugh, and they sank down to join the minnows and the pebbles at the bottom of the stream. In the latter case the owner would lie flat on the bank with a sharp stone pressing into his chest, and feel for the lost craft in the cold, slippery waters ; for the rest of the morning his shirt-sleeve would cling damply to his skin, while the assembled experts considered the failure and made acute suggestions.

The stream—we called it a river—on which we sailed these ships passed in its cheerful course through an iron pipe, and sometimes a vessel that had disappeared merrily under

the dark, arch would be seen no more of our eyes, though we waited at the other end of the passage perilous until our bodies grew chill in our sailor suits, and the mists came rolling up from the water-meadows. It was easy to crouch down by the mouth of the pipe, and hear the water lap-lapping in the dark against the echoing sides of the tunnel, but our ears could tell us nothing, and as we went home we would speculate in whispers as to the fate of the missing vessel. Had it foundered on some treacherous rock, or was there some mysterious outlet unknown to man, through which it had escaped us? Even while we spoke it might be nodding on merrily towards the night and the stars, through a new, strange country that no one could find in daylight fashion.

In truth, there was no game like this, appealing alike to mind and body, and fraught with surprises and enchanting side-issues of play. We might launch our vessel at dawn for Babylon, and night would find it dreaming by some South Sea isle, or lying a shattered wreck on the coast of Brazil.

Doubtless to the grown-up observer, who

40 THE DAY BEFORE YESTERDAY

had seen the great sea dotted with little ships, our gutter mishaps and adventures on puddles were of small importance. But as becomes the children of an island race, we played this game with a strange earnestness, and though our boats were small, we knew that they were large enough for little boys to go roaming in through the long day. And that was all that mattered.

A REPERTORY THEATRE

LIKE most great movements in art, it had but a modest beginning. On a memorable day one of my brothers was looking in the window of a little toy-shop when he discovered some of those fascinating sheets of characters to which Stevenson has devoted a charming essay. He happened to have money in his pocket (it was indeed a memorable day), and he brought home his treasure-trove with the air of a capitalist who has made a wise investment. Schoolroom society approved his enterprise with enthusiasm. We knew nothing about "The Woodman's Hut," the play to which the characters in question belonged; it was enough for us that these figures of men and women were clearly messengers from the Land of Romance, and their mysterious attitudes only added to the interest with which we regarded

42 THE DAY BEFORE YESTERDAY

them. We got out our paint-boxes, and, as unconsciously we were all Post-Impressionists, we soon made them more mysterious still.

It will be remembered that Stevenson remained satisfied with this, which might be regarded as the costumier's work of the model theatre, but we were more ambitious. Our first theatre was a small packing-case without any sides, and in this our characters, mounted on cardboard and supplied with firewood supports, were quite contented to display their red legs and green bodies. Our scenery was indicated rather than drawn on brown paper with coloured chalks, and would, I think, have pleased Mr. Gordon Craig. Two Christmas-tree candles served for footlights, and, though we had no book of the words, we made them up as we went along, and did very well. It was strange how great a measure of illusion we achieved, although we ourselves moved the puppets and spoke their lines. The candles threw queer shadows across our faces, and it seemed as though deeper voices than ours echoed in the room. We were always being

astonished by the eerie products of our own imagination when we were merely trying to amuse ourselves ; and the effect of our dramatic efforts was quite remote from anything that we had intended. I understand that older dramatists sometimes experience the same phenomenon.

Our activities could not long escape the criticism of the grown-up people ; but rather to our surprise, for candles were quite illicit playthings, they contented themselves with a general caution as to the perils of fire, and a particular injunction concerning the dropping of candle-grease on the tablecloth. So we played with our theatre till Christmas, by which time the members of our stock company were more than a little battered and weary at the knees. Then there came a surprise. Included in the number of our presents were a little theatre with a real curtain that went up and down, and materials for three complete productions. This time we had not only the characters, but the books of words and scenery as well, and we prepared to do things on an unprecedented scale. As a result, after extraordi-

44 THE DAY BEFORE YESTERDAY

nary labour in the scenic and costume departments, we were able to produce, on three successive nights, "Paul Clifford," "The Corsican Brothers," and "The Miller and his Men." The repertory theatre was fairly under way.

First-nights were really thrilling in those days. The dignified deportment of our actors, as yet unspoiled by success, roused the audience to enthusiasm, and we did not weary of admiring simple stage effects that would have moved us to scornful laughter in after-days. Yet even in these early productions there lurked the seeds of artistic disruption. Already our appreciation of the gallant bearing of Paul Clifford passed all reasonable bounds, and threatened to develop into that hero-worship that proves fatal to the talents of any actor. Already we had an unwholesome craving for excessive realism in the staging of plays, and we made use of the ingenuity of our elders to drive Grindoff's sinister windmill in the first act of "The Miller and his Men." It might be said that our theatre, *quâ* repertory theatre, was doomed from the start.

Nevertheless, at least two seasons of good work were accomplished before our morbid imitation of Nature and the illimitable egotism of Paul Clifford finally succeeded in driving art from the stage. During that period we produced about fifteen new plays, and gave a large number of one-night revivals. Our repertory ranged from "Hamlet" to "Dick Whittington," and I think one pleased us as much as the other. This would have been more remarkable if Paul Clifford had not played the title-part in both plays. We had soon come to prefer him to any other of the heroes, and in consequence, whatever the play might be, he was bound to be there in his riding-boots and handsome yellow satin coat. This would have been well enough if he had been willing to keep his place, but he soon became as ubiquitous as an actor-manager. Owing to the number of rôles that he was called upon to fill, we had his pasteboard presentment in a hundred different attitudes, and on one occasion when a stage-crowd was required it was entirely composed of Paul Cliffords, and even then there were rows of

forlorn Paul Cliffords in the wings' for whom there was no room on the stage. This was the beginning of the end. We suffered from the worst excesses of the star system; we began to be discontented when Paul was not on the stage, and we were prepared to boo if that dashing highwayman was not permitted to bluster across the most subtle dramas.

About this time we deserted the old theatre that had been the scene of so many triumphs for a larger and far more elaborate one. We had long had gas footlights, but now our system of lighting was intricate enough to suit Mr. Arthur Collins. Indeed, when, years afterwards, I was allowed to explore the stage of Drury Lane, I found nothing to surprise me, save, perhaps, the electric switchboard, with its pretty display of diminutive electric lights. Our scenic sensations were only surpassed by those of Mr. Bruce Smith. When we played a dramatisation of "Hard Cash," the scuttled vessel sank in a sea of real water. The fountains in our Garden of Enchantment flung scented torrents into their moss-clad basins; and

when we 'sought to reproduce a burning house we succeeded in setting the theatre on fire.

It will be understood that by that time we had come to rely on the grown-up people for assistance in producing plays, and we had substituted their perverted adult taste for our juvenile conceptions of drama. The old plays, with their homely characters and dignified simplicity of setting, no longer pleased us. We craved for a debauch of Paul Clifford, and every new production had to be more elaborate in its insentient mimicry of life than the one before. The inevitable happened. The more our stage-setting approximated to Nature, and the more Paul pirouetted in the limelight, the less we attained to that illusion which had been so easy to achieve on a packing-case stage with two little coloured candles for footlights. There came a day when Paul no longer interested us, and we felt that we had exhausted the possibilities of the sensational. The theatre was closed, and when, many months afterwards, a vague curiosity led us to ask what had become of it, we

48 THE DAY BEFORE YESTERDAY

learnt with but little regret that our elders had given it away to some little boy whose taste in drama was as yet unsophisticated. I wonder what he made of our real sea and our practicable fountains!

Not very long ago I was turning over some old books, when a small piece of cardboard slipped from between the pages and fell to the ground. It was in the likeness of a man, a man dressed in riding-boots and yellow satin; yet it was some moments before I realised that I was in the presence of the once great Paul Clifford. With recognition came something like remorse. It was no more than just to forgive his faults after so many years, and he really was a very good actor until an excess of praise turned his little pasteboard head.

I looked round the library, and after due consideration took a volume of the Laureate's poems from the shelves, and laid the tired highwayman to rest between its pages.

"Sleep on, brave Paul!" I said softly. "No one will ever disturb you there."

And now I have written his epitaph.

CHILDREN AND THE SPRING

POETS and careless, happy fellows like that may say what they like for the spring, but there are only two seasons in the year for children. The parties of Christmas appealed to our senses in a hundred pleasant ways, They shone with Jack Frost and Chinese lanterns and the gay gelatine from crackers ; they compressed our limbs in the pride of new, uncomfortable suits and tight, shiny shoes ; they tasted of burnt raisins and orange jelly ; they sang with frosty carols and sensible tunes and the agreeable din of penny musical instruments ; they smelt of Christmas-tree candles and tangerine oranges. Then there were pantomimes and large silver pieces from the pockets of millionaire uncles, and if all else failed, the possibility of snow. Certainly there was nothing the matter with winter.

50 THE DAY BEFORE YESTERDAY

Summer, too, had its fierce, immeasurable joys. This was the season of outdoor sports, hunting and boating and digging holes to New Zealand. There was cricket, real cricket, which means that you are out if you hit the ball into the next garden, and that you stop playing if you break a window, and there was hurling of javelins in wild shrubberies, and dabbling in silver brooks for elusive minnows. Later there would come long, adventurous journeys in railway-trains, when, like wise travellers, we would cuddle provisions of buns and pears and tepid sandwiches in our laps. Our legs would be so stiff when we reached our destination that we would totter on the platform like old men, and our eyes would be weary with watching the fleeting world. But as the cab crept up the gritty hills we would see the ocean waiting for us to come and play with it, and everything else in life would be forgotten. The country, with its apple-trees and its pigs and its secret places, was not to be despised, but it was the sea that led us home to our dreams.

Yet possibly the finest thing that the

summer had to give us was the healthy, joyous sense of fatigue that comes from games. It was pleasant to drop on the lawn when cricket was over, and stay there, not wholly displeased with the scent of the flowers, looking into the blue sky until the guats drove you in to tea. It was pleasant to lie on the beach, with the heat creeping up and down your face, and to let the sand trickle through your fingers, while the long waves whispered out to sea. It was pleasant to drowse in the hay after hunting buffaloes all the sunny afternoon. It was only at such moments, when the air had a savour of sleep, that we really felt conscious of youth as a desirable possession.

A child's year would be divided abruptly into winter and summer, for youth is impatient of compromise, but as things are, there are spring and autumn to be reckoned with. For autumn, there is not much to be said. There were nuts and blackberries, and the sweet-scented fallen leaves, in which we would paddle up to our knees. But the sea-side brown was wearing off our legs, and night came so soon and with so harsh and

52 THE DAY BEFORE YESTERDAY

boisterous a note. It was not bad when we happened to be feeling very brave to lie awake at night and hear the branches screaming when the wind hurt them. The sheer discomfort of the outer world made bed delicious. But the necessary courage for this point of view was rare, and normally we would wish the nights quieter and less exciting. The autumn wind was for ever fumbling at our nursery windows like a burglar, or creeping along the passages like a supernatural thing. Sometimes our hearts stopped beating while we listened.

But of all the seasons of the year, spring is most oppressive to the spirit of childhood. The dear, artificial things that had made the winter lovely were gone, and the pastoral delights of the summer were still to come, yet Nature called us forth to a muddy, unfinished world. Then was the season of the official walk, a dreary traffic on nice, clean pavements, that placed everything in the world worth walking to out of bounds. A cold wind without the compensating advantage of snow would swing round the corners of streets, and we would feel as if

we were' wearing the ears and noses of other people. When we were not quarrelling we were sulking, and each was equally fatal, for the Olympians only needed a pretext to make our days bitter with iron and quinine. And our quarrels, that at kinder seasons of the year were the regretted accidents of moments, lingered now from day to day, and became the source of fierce and lonely pride. If one of us, released for a minute from the wearing of the world's woes, made timid efforts to arrange a concerted game, he would become the object of general suspicion, and his sociability would be regarded as a hypocritical effort to win the favour of the grown-up folk. The correct attitude was one of surly aloofness that spluttered once or twice a day into tearful rebellion against the interference of the authorities. It is insulting to give a man medicine when he tells you that he wishes he were dead.

Of course, underlying these disorders was just that dim spirit of disquiet that has made this season of the year notable for the production of lyric poetry. We had no means of expressing the thing that troubled

54 THE DAY BEFORE YESTERDAY

our blood. Indeed, we ourselves did not know what was the matter, though this ignorance did not make our discomfort less. Time, who in the glare of a Christmas party, or on the shore of a summer sea could run faster than we, seemed to take a spiteful pleasure in lingering in this unattractive place. And although our attitude towards life appeared to have been determined for us by Fate, when the long day ended and we thought over things in bed, we had not even the satisfaction of being proud of our day's work. We would vow silently to our pillows that things should go better to-morrow, but alas! there might be many morrows before summer brought peace to our blood.

It is not only children whom the spring winds stir to madness, but a man has striven but poorly if he cannot contrive to bear in patience with this vernal torment of living, or even to turn it to some useful purpose in his work. But children, who can only express themselves in their play, must pay for the joys of the coming summer in moods speechless and almost too bitter for their

years. In sympathy with all the green, quick things of Nature, their blood is in a state of passionate unrest for which their minds can supply no adequate reason, and they are unhappy in consequence. But I am far from blaming the Olympians for the attitude they adopted in this difficult business. They kept a wise eye on our health, and if our naughtiness became outrageous, we were punished. For the rest, as they could not give us lips of silver and a pipe of gold with which to chant the amazing gladness of the spring, I do not see what they could do.

ON NURSERY CUPBOARDS

THEY were deep and wide and tall, and filled as to the lower shelves with a number of objects which no child of spirit could find interesting any longer. Here were the battered fragments of the presents of bygone birthdays, of which the true ownership was dubious, because we none of us would confess that we had ever been young enough to receive such childish gifts. Here also were foolish trifles from forgotten Christmas-trees, useless objects employed by the fraudulent to give their trees a deceitful appearance of wealth. Then there were the presents that were too useful: the elevating gifts of aunts and the improving offerings of god-parents, things that either trespassed on the arid land of lessons or presumed some grown-up virtue which the recipient neither had nor coveted. The Olympians

would refer to these dull possessions in the aggregate as "the children's toys"; but we knew better. Our true treasures, the things we loved, never saw the inside of that unromantic depository save through the thoughtless tidying of our rulers. The works of watches and mechanical toys, our soldiers and cannon of brass, our fleet of walnut boats and empty cartridge-cases—these things and their brothers slept under our pillows or in the very private cardboard boot-box under the bed. By day those that were being employed were spread about the floor or strained our pockets to bursting-point. The people who were too old to know any better referred to them contemptuously as "rubbish," a word we privately reserved for their aggravating presents. And though the long interval that separated dinner and tea on wet days might weary us of our immediate jewels, it was not in the cupboard that we sought relief from Boredom. It is true that now and again some Gentleman Adventurer would climb on a chair and investigate the shelves that were supposed to be beyond

our reach, to return with piratical spoil of matches and cotton and citrate of magnesia, a cate that tingles pleasantly on the tongue of youth. But even from this point of view it could not compare with the rich cupboards of the kitchen and the dining-room, those Meccas of piracy that filled our dreams with monstrous raisins and pickled onions, a successful pilgrimage to which would assure a man the admiring homage of his comrades for days to come.

In short, we were content to regard the toy-cupboard as a harmless hobby of the grown-up people, and we were not far wrong. It was not for them to understand that one general cupboard could not hold the real treasures of four children, whose sense of possession was keen even to the point of battle. It was a dustbin for toys that had been found out, and we would have scorned to display its sordid contents to our friends. To them, if they were worthy, were revealed the true mysteries, the things that we fought for and made into dreams, the sun and moon and stars of our imaginative heaven. Sentimental elders might greet it with tears for

their lost youth if they wished ; we received their congratulations calmly, and kept our pity for their insanity to ourselves.

In truth, the thing was a symbol for all our relations with grown-up people. They always seemed so sensible and yet they could not understand. If we fell off the banisters on to our heads they would overwhelm us with sympathy, when every one knows that a big lump on the head is a thing to be proud of. But if a well-meaning aunt insisted on reading to us for a whole afternoon in the horse-chestnut season we were expected, and even commanded, to be grateful for this undesired favour. And so it was in the matter of toys. Sometimes, by accident as it were, they gave us sensible things that we really wanted. But as a rule their presents were concrete things that gave our imaginations no chance. We only wanted something to make a "think" about, but few of the official presents were suitable for this purpose. One of the gifts that delighted me most as a child was a blue glass dish, large and shallow. Filled with water it became a real blue sea, very proper for

the navigation of smaller craft. Empty and subverted it became the dome of an azure city. And holding it before my eyes I would see a blue world, a place the existence of which I had previously only suspected. An ocean, a city, and a world combine to make a better present than a commonplace toy. Once in a blue moon I have seen strange sights, and something of the glamour of that dish is with me even now.

Naturally, in course of time an uncommon significance became attached to such things as this, and I should have no more thought of keeping my blue sea in the same cupboard as my brother's maxim gun than he would have allowed that excellent weapon to be the bedfellow of my sister's famous one-legged nigger doll. We realised far better than our elders the meaning of their favourite shibboleth, "a place for everything"; we knew that the sea, air would rust a caannon, and that poor Dorothy could swim but poorly with her one dusky leg. So we tacitly left the cupboard as a place wherein the grown-ups could keep the toys

they gave us to please themselves, and found exclusive and more sympathetic hiding-places for our treasures. Now and again a toy might pass through both stages of existence. Mechanical toys did not amuse us at all, until the donors were tired of playing with them, and we might pull them to pieces and make them our very own. And the costly gifts of uncles were useless until the authorities had ceased to see that we took care of them. But these doubtful cases apart, we would divide our presents *into their respective groups as soon as we had removed the wrappings*. "This and this can go into the cupboard, but this shall go to bed with me to-night!" It was not the person who "understands" children who was most fortunate in the choice of gifts.

For the rest, with unconscious satire, we constituted the toy-cupboard the state prison, of the nursery. Refractory dolls and kittens, and soldiers awaiting court-martial, repented their crimes in its depressing gloom, and this was really the only share it had in our amusements. Beyond that it stood merely for official "play," a melancholy traffic in

which we never indulged. Its shelves were crowded with the illusions of grown-up people, and, if we considered it at all, it was in the same aspect in which we were wont to regard them. They were obviously well-meaning, but somehow or other they lacked understanding, and the nursery cupboard was full in consequence.

THE FAT MAN

I MET him first at Lord's, the best place, perhaps, in all London for making acquaintances and even friends. Even if he had not worn a light suit of clothes that drew the critical eye inevitably to his monstrous girth he would have been conspicuous as occupying with difficulty the space provided for two persons on an afternoon when seats were at a premium. But though I own to no prejudice against flesh in itself, it was not his notable presence that induced me to speak to him, but rather the appealing glances that he threw to right and left of him when he thought to have detected that fine wine of the game which, tasted socially, changes a cricket match to a rare and solemn festival. Such an invitation is one that no one for whom cricket is an inspiration can refuse, and it was natural that thereafter we should

praise and criticise in wise and sympathetic chorus.

The acquaintance thus begun warmed to intimacy at the Oval and Canterbury, and I began to seek his easily recognisable figure on cricket-grounds with eagerness, to feel a pang of disappointment if he was not there. For though to his careless eye his great moonlike face might suggest no more than good-natured stupidity, I had soon discovered that this exuberance of form barely concealed a delicate and engaging personality, that within those vast galleries of flesh there roamed the timid spirit of a little child. I have said that to the uncritical his face might seem wanting in intelligence, but it was rather that the normal placidity of his features suggested a lack of emotional sensitiveness. Save with his eyes—and it needed experience to read their message—he had no means of expressing his minor emotions, no compromise between his wonted serenity and the monstrous phenomenon of his laughter, that induced a facial metamorphosis almost too startling to convey an impression of mirth. If normally his face

might be compared with a deep, still pool, laughter may be said to have stirred it up with a stick, and the consequent ripples seemed to roll to the very extremities of his body, growing in force as they went, so that his hands and feet vibrated in humorous ecstasy.

Later, when, in one of his quaint interrogative moods, he showed me a photograph of himself as a child, I was able to give form to the charming spirit that Nature had burdened with this grievous load. I saw the picture of a strikingly handsome little boy, with dark, wide eyes and slightly parted lips that alike told of a noble sense of wonder. This, I felt, was the man I knew, whose connection with that monstrous shape of flesh had been so difficult to trace. Yet strangely I could recognise the features of the boy in the expansive areas of the man. In the light of the photograph he resembled one of those great cabbage-roses that a too lavish season has swollen beyond all flower-like proportions, yet which are none the less undeniably roses. Others might find him clumsy, elephantine, colossal; thenceforward he was for me clearly boyish.

His voice varied more in tone and quality than that of any other man I have ever met, and over these variations he seemed to have little control; and this, too, made it very difficult for strangers to detect the trippings and hesitancies, gentle, wayward, and infinitely sensitive, of his childlike temperament. Within the limits of one simple utterance he would achieve sounds resembling the drumming of sudden rain on galvanised iron and the ecstatic whistlings of dew-drunk birds. It was sometimes difficult to follow the purport of his speech for sheer wonder at the sounds that slid and leaped and burst from his lips. His voice reminded me of a child strumming on some strange musical instrument of extraordinary range and capacity which it had not learned how to play. His laughter was ventriloquial and rarely bore any accountable relationship to the expressions of mirth of ordinary men. It was like an explosive rendering of one of those florid scales dear to piano-tuners, but sometimes it suggested rather an earthquake in his boots.

He dwelt in a little flat that seemed like

the upper floor of a doll's-house when related to its proprietor, and here it was his delight to dispense a hospitality charmingly individual. His meals recalled nothing so much as the illicit feasts held in school dormitories, and when he peered curiously into his own cupboards he always looked as if he were about to steal jam. He would produce viand after viand with the glee of a successful explorer, and in terms of his eager hospitality the most bizarre cates appeared congruous and even intimately connected, so that at his board grown men would eat like schoolboys, with the great careless appetite of youth.

He had a fine library and a still finer collection of mechanical toys, which were for him a passion and a delight. It was pleasant to see him set some painted piece of clockwork careering on the hearthrug, stooping over it tenderly, with wondering eyes, and hands intent to guard it from disaster. It was pleasant, too, to hear him recite Swinburne, of whom he was a passionate admirer; for, though his voice would be as rebellious as ever, his whole

body would thrill and pulse with the music of the poet. He always touched books softly because he loved them. Of bonfires he spoke reverently, though a London flat hardly lent itself to their active exploitation; and I remember that he told me once that nothing gave him a keener sense of what he had lost in growing up than the scent of burning twigs and leaves. Yet if he felt this loss, what should it have been for us who had come so much farther than he!

Himself a child, he was beloved of children and treated by them as an equal; but I never knew another child who was so easily and continuously amused. The Hippodrome, the British Museum, the Tower of London, and the art of Messrs. Maskelyne and Devant alike raised in him the highest enthusiasm, which he expressed with charming but sometimes embarrassing freedom. Alone of all men, perhaps, he found the Royal Academy wholly satisfying, and it could be said of him truly that if he did not admire the picture he would always like the frame. He had a huge admiration for any one who did anything, and he liked riding in lifts.

Though he treated women with elaborate courtesy, their society made him self-conscious, and he, who could direct his body featly enough in a crowded street, was apt to be clumsy in drawing-rooms. Perhaps it was for this reason that they had apparently played no marked part in his life, and I may be wrong in attaching any special significance to a phrase he made one quiet evening in his flat. We had been speaking of the latest sensation in our group of mutual acquaintances, of the marriage of Phyllis, daintiest and most witty of cricket-lovers, to a man in whom the jealously critical eyes of her friends could perceive no charm ; but the conversation had dwindled to silence when he said, "Surely his love can make any man lovely !"

Then, as if the subject were closed, he fell to speaking of his latest pocket-knife with boyish animation ; but the phrase dwelt in my mind, though the image of the brave boy with wide eyes and lips parted in wonder was all that I ever knew of the man who made it.

CAROL SINGERS

WHEN we were boys there was no part of the Christmas festivities to which we looked forward more eagerly than the singing of carols from house to house on Christmas Eve. If the night fell wild and rainy, we had to abandon our tuneful journey and content ourselves with singing indoors. But if it was a dry night, we set forth joyfully, even though a disquieted moon and inattentive stars foretold a wet Christmas. Our hearts were lighter than men's hearts can be, as we clattered down the lanes, fortified by a hot supper and possibly a scalding tumblerful of mulled claret. We would always start at the houses of friends, and then, made bold by success, we would sing our glad tidings to any house which had a lit window. For the credit of human nature it may be said that we were made welcome

wherever we went. Sometimes people offered us money, which our code forbade us to accept, though we should have liked it well enough; more frequently we were asked to come in and have something to eat or drink, offers with which even the infinite capacity of youth could by no means cope. If the night was frosty it was pleasant to toast ourselves for a minute or two in front of the fire before going out again into a world of frozen ruts, sparkling hedgerows, and mysterious shadows, wherein we felt ourselves veritable figures of romance.

• And, indeed, we ourselves sang better than we knew. However cheerfully and noisily we might undertake the expedition, it was not long before we became aware that other spirits were abroad. The simple words and merry tunes which we sang suddenly became wonderfully significant. Between the verses we heard the sheep calling on far hills while the shepherd kings rode down to Bethlehem with their gifts. The trees and fields and houses took up the chant, and our noises were blended with that deep song of the Universe which the new ears of the young

72 THE DAY BEFORE YESTERDAY

hear so often and so clearly. When our carol was over there would fall a great silence that seemed to our quickened senses to be but a gentler and sweeter music of hope and joy. As we passed from one house to the next we spoke to each other in whispers for fear we should break the spell that held the night enchanted. Even as we heard other noises when we sang, so now we heard the sound of other feet that trod the same glad road as our own. From being a half-dozen of little boys come out to have some fun on Christmas eve, we had become a small section of a great army. Tramp, tramp, the joyful feet fell before and behind us along the road, and when we stopped to sing, the whole night thrilled into a triumphant ecstasy of song. On such nights the very earth, it seemed, sang carols.

It is, perhaps, our vivid recollection of the glories of those memorable Christmas Eves that leads us to be gentle with the little boys and girls who sing at our door to-night. We have all listened to the eloquent persons who can prove that Christmas is not what it used to be. They point to the decadence

of pantomime, the decay of the waits and mummers, and the democratic impudence of those who demand Christmas-boxes. Well, it may be —, but children do like modern pantomimes in spite of the generalisations of critics ; and though a Salvation Army band is an unpicturesque substitute for such a village orchestra as is described in "Under the Greenwood Tree," it at least satisfies the ear of the sentimentalist at two o'clock of a frosty morning. That Christmas-boxes are a nuisance is no new discovery. We find Swift grumbling to Stella about them exactly two hundred years ago. Mummers, we are told, are still to be found in the country ; five years back we saw them ourselves and were satisfied that they had learnt their rather obscure rhymes from their fathers before them, and not from any well-meaning society for faking old customs.

This said, it must be admitted that carol-singers are not what they were. Of the long procession of ragged children who have sung "While shepherds watched their flocks by night" at our gate this December, not one had taken the trouble to learn either

74 THE DAY BEFORE YESTERDAY

the words or the tune accurately. When asked to sing some other carol they broke down, and it was apparent that they were trusting to their hungry and thinly clad appearance rather than to their singing as a means to obtain alms from the charitable. Sometimes—this we fear is really a modern note—the father was waiting in the background to collect the takings! It is rather difficult to know what to do in such cases, for the children may be punished if they are not successful; and yet the practice of sending insufficiently clad children into the streets on a winter's night is hardly to be encouraged.

Nevertheless, though the abuse is manifest, we would hesitate to say that the custom of singing carols at our doors should be stopped. It is difficult to read the heart of a child aright, but it seems to us at least possible that a few of the children win more than a mere handful of pennies from their singing. Though they mumble their words to a tune they only half remember, it is not likely that the spirit that made wonderful the Christmas Eves of long ago shall alto-

gether pass them by. Surely the night conspires with lights of the world to enchant them, and for their own ears their voices achieve beauty beyond the measure of mortal song.

In truth, this is a dream that we can ill afford to spare. It seems a pity, however, that the children are not taught carol-singing at school, especially as they are now often taught, to our great content, the old games and dances. Many of the older carols are really beautiful, both in the homely simplicity of their words and in the unaffected charm of the airs to which they are set. The desire of the average child for song is extraordinary—as extraordinary, perhaps, as the regrettable contempt of the average adult for poetry. Last year we were present at the dress rehearsal of the pantomime at Drury Lane, and we heard a theatreful of poor children sing the music-hall ditties of the hour with wonderful spirit and intensity. Our emotions were mixed. Mingled with the natural pleasure that they should be enjoying themselves was something of regret for the sad lives that so small a

76 THE DAY BEFORE YESTERDAY

treat should rouse to ecstasy. Afterwards we felt sorry that the children had nothing better to sing. We have no prejudice against music-hall songs in general. They are not as intelligent as they might be, but they serve their time in pleasing, harmlessly enough, a number of people who also are not as intelligent as they might be. But somehow the lyres of little singing children deserve better fare than this. We look forward to a time when they will have it.

THE MAGIC CARPET

THERE were two rugs in the library, and for some time we used to dispute the vexed question of their relative merits. *Æ*sthetically, there was something to be said for both of them. The rug that stood by the writing-desk from which father wrote to the newspapers was soft and furry; indeed, it was almost as pleasant a couch as the sofa with the soft cushions in the drawing-room, which was taboo. Moreover, it leant itself very readily to such fashionable winter sport as bear-hunting, providing as it did a trackless prairie, a dangerous marsh, or the quarry itself as the adventure required. The joys of the other rug were of a calmer kind, and were, perhaps, chiefly due to its advantageous position before the fire. It was pleasant to toast oneself on a winter evening and trace with idle fingers

the agreeable deviations of its pattern. Sometimes it might be the ground plan of a make-up city, with forts and sweet-shops and palaces for our friends ; sometimes it would be a maze, and we would pursue, with bated breath, the vaulted passages that led to the dread lair of the Minotaur. But such plots as these were of passive, rather than active, interest. Reviewing the argument dispassionately, Fenimore Cooper may have had a slight advantage over Nathaniel Hawthorne ; bear-hunting may have been a little more popular than the dim excitements of Greek myth.

But while the discussion was at its height, there dawned in the East the sun that was to prove fatal to Perseus and the Deerslayer alike. I do not know from which of our uncles "The Arabian Nights" first came to an enraptured audience ; but I am sure that an uncle must have been responsible for its coming, for as a gift it was avuncular in its splendour. We quickly realised that the world had changed, and took the necessary steps to welcome our new guest. The old lamp in the hall that had graced the illicit

doings of pirates and smugglers in the past was thenceforward the property of Aladdin; a strange bottle that had been Crusoe's served to confine the unfortunate genie; and with quickening pulses we discovered that in the fireside rug we possessed no less a treasure than the original magic carpet.

I must explain that we were not like those fortunate children of whom Miss Nesbit writes with such humorous charm. To us there fell no tremendous adventures; we might polish Aladdin's lamp till it shone like the moon without gaining a single concrete acid-drop for our pains. But the "Arabian Nights" gave us all that we ever thought of seeking either in books or toys in those uncritical days—a starting-point for our dreams. And this, I take it, is the best thing that a writer can give a child, and it was for lack of this that we considered the works of Lewis Carroll silly, while finding one of the books of Miss Molesworth—I wish I could recall its name—a masterpiece of fancy and erudition.

So when the din of the schoolroom did not suit my mood, or the authorities were

80 THE DAY BEFORE YESTERDAY

unduly didactic, I would slip away to the twilight library and guide the magic carpet through the delicate meadows of my dreams. The fire would blaze and crackle in the grate and fill my eyes with tears, so that it was easy to fancy myself in a sparkling world of sunshine. And from the shadows of the room little creatures would creep out to touch my glowing cheeks with cool, soft fingers, or to pluck timidly at the sleeve of my coat. I did not endeavour to give these shy companions of the dark any definite place in my universe. Their sympathetic reticence was reassuring in that room, of great leaping shadows, and I was glad that they should keep me company in the blackness, a thing so terrible when I woke up at night in my bed. Sometimes, perhaps, I wondered how they could bear to live in the place where nightmare was; but for the rest I accepted their society gladly and without question. There was plenty of room on the carpet for such quiet fellows, and if they liked to accompany me on my travels I, at least, would not prevent them.

It did not occur to me at the time, as

it certainly does now, that I should never again be so near to fairyland as I was then. I was inclined to be sceptical concerning the actual existence of the supernatural, though I recognised that a judicious acceptance of its theories set a new kingdom beneath one's feet for play. And it is only now that I realise how wonderfully vivid my dreams were, with what zest of timid life the little shadow-folk thrilled and trembled round me. It is true that I remained conscious of my normal environment; the fire, the dark room, and the bookcases were all there, and even a kind of quiet sense of the World beyond the Door, the hall and the passages and my brothers and sisters at their quarrels. But it was as if these things had become merely an idea in my mind, while my feet were set on the pleasant roads of a new world. The thing that I had hoped became true; and the truth that I had been taught lingered in my mind only as a familiar story, a business of second-hand emotions, neither very desirable nor very interesting. The little folk gathered and whispered round me in

the dark, and there was full day in the world that was my own.

It was hard to leave that world for this other place, which even now I cannot understand; but when some errant Olympian or righteously indignant brother had dragged me from my lair, I did not attempt to defend myself from the charge of moodiness. I had no words to tell them what they had done, and I could only stand blinking beneath the light of the gas in the hall, and endeavour to recall their wholly tiresome rules and regulations for the life of youth. Dimly I knew that my right place was before the fire in the library, and I wondered whether the little folk could use the Magic Carpet without me, or whether they stayed expectant in the shadows, like me, a little lonely, and a little chill. But in those days moodiness was only a lesser crime than sulkiness, and I had perforce to fold up my fancies and pass, an emotional bankrupt, into the unsympathetic world of the playroom. To-morrow, perhaps, the Magic Carpet might be mine again; meanwhile, I would exist.

Peter Pan has asked us a good many times whether we believe in fairies. It is, of course, a matter of faith, to be accepted or denied, but not to be discussed. For my part, I think of a little boy nodding on a rug before the fire on many a winter's evening, and I clap my hands. Gratitude could do no less.

STAGE CHILDREN

I do not know that at any time Hastings is a very lively place. The houses have acquired a habit of being vacant, and even the front, with its bath-chairs, its hand-stands that are silent on Sundays, and its seats upon which one may not smoke, is more suggestive of Puritans and invalids than of pleasure. If Time should suddenly drop a week from the due order of days, it is easy to imagine that those bath-chairs, those unfragrant shelters, those much-labelled houses would startle the dreaming tourists with vacant faces of dead men. But when in late March the day has squandered its gold, and the earth is saddened with the gentle greyness of the dusk, when, moreover, the cheerful sea has deserted the shore, creeping far out to leave dull acres of untrodden sand, waste and bitter with salt, a

man might surely be forgiven if he cried aloud against the extreme cruelty of Nature, the timid injustice of man.

Being of Anglo-Saxon blood, I did not give definite expression to the melancholy which the quenched seascape had invoked. I contented myself with leaning on the rail, and sneering at the art of the cripple who had made mathematically exact scratchings of Windsor Castle and the Eddystone Lighthouse on the sand. There was something almost humorously impertinent about that twisted figure with one foot bowing and hopping for pennies in front of a terrible back-cloth of dreamy grey. How could a man forget the horrors of infinite space, and scratch nothings on the blank face of the earth for coppers? His one foot was bare so that his Silver-like activities might not spoil his pictures, and when he was not hopping he shivered miserably. As I saw him at the moment he stood very well for humanity—sordid, grotesque, greedy of mean things, twisted and bruised by the pitiless hand of Nature.

And then in a flash there happened one of

those miracles which rebuke us when we lack faith. Through the shadows which were not grey but purple there burst a swarm of children running on light feet across the sands. They chased each other hither and thither, stooped to gather shells and seaweed, and inspected the works of the cripple with outspoken admiration. Regarding my mournful and terrible world in detail, they found it beautiful with pink shells and tangled seaweed and the gallant efforts of men. So far from being terrified or humiliated by the sombre wastes of sand and sky, they made of the one a playing-ground, and woke the other with echoes of their shrill laughter. Perhaps they found that the sea was rather larger than the Serpentine, perhaps they thought that the sands were not so well lit as Kingsway; but, after all, they were making holiday, and at such a time things are different. They laughed at space.

For these were London children, and all the resources of civilisation had not been able to deprive them of that sense of proportion which we lose with age. The stars are

small and of little importance, and even the sun is not much larger than a brandy-ball. But a golden pebble by the seashore is a treasure that a child may hold in its hand, and it is certain that never a grown-up one of us can own anything so surely. We may search our memories for sunsets and tresses of dead girls, but who would not give all their faded fragrance for one pink shell and the power to appreciate it? So it was that I had found the world wide and ugly and terrible, lacking the Aladdin's lamp of imagination, which had shown the children that it was a place of treasure, with darkness to make the search exciting. They flitted about the beach like eager moths.

Yet on these children Civilisation had worked with her utmost cunning, with her most recent resource. For they were little actors and actresses from Drury Lane, touring in a pantomime of their own; wise enough in the world's ways to play grown-up characters with uncommon skill, and bred in the unreality of the footlights and the falsehood of grease-paints. Nevertheless, coming fresh from the elaborate make-belief

of the theatre and the intoxicating applause, they ran down to the sea to find the diamonds and pearls that alone are real. If this is not wisdom I know not where wisdom lies, and, watching them, I could have laughed aloud at the thought of the critics who have told me that the life of the stage makes children unnatural. There are many wise and just people who do not like to see children acting, forgetting perhaps that mimicry is the keynote of all child's play, and that nothing but this instinct leads babies to walk upright and to speak with their tongues. Whether they are on the stage or not, children are always borrowing the words and emotions of other people, and it is a part of the charm of childhood that through this mask of tricks and phrases the real child peeps always into the eyes and hearts of the elect.

And this is why I know nothing more delightful than the spectacle of a score of children playing at life on the stage. They may have been taught how to speak and how to stand, and what to do with their hands; they may know how to take a

prompt, and realise the importance of dressing the stage; every trick and mannerism of the grown-up actor or actress may be theirs; yet, through their playing there will sound the voice of childhood, imaginative, adventurous, insistent, and every performance will supply them with materials for a new game. So it was with these children, whose sudden coming had strewn the melancholy beach with pearls. I had seen them in the dimness of a ballet-room under Drury Lane Theatre; now, with a coin, I bought the right to see them on a stage built with cynical impertinence in the midst of the intolerant sea. The play, indeed, was the same, and the players, but the game was different. The little breaks and falterings which the author had not designed, the only half-suppressed laughings which were not in the prompt-copy, bore no relationship, one might suppose, to the moral adventures of Mother Goose. But far across the hills the spring was breaking the buds on the lilac, and far along the shore the sea was casting its jewels, and even there in the theatre I could see the children standing on tiptoe to

pick lilac, and stooping on the sands to gather pearls. They did not see that they were in a place of lank ropes and unsmoothed boards soiled with the dust of forgotten pageants and rendered hideous by the glare of electric lights; and they were right. For in their eyes there shone only that place of adventure which delights the feet of the faithful, whether they tread the sands, or the stage, or the rough cobbles of Drury Lane. To the truly imaginative a theatre is a place of uncommon possibilities; our actors and actresses, and even our lime-light-men, are not imaginative, and so, I suppose, they find it ugly. The game is with the children.

And truly they play it for what it is worth, and they are wise enough to know that it is worth all things, alike on the boards of the theatre and on the wider, but hardly less artificial, stage of civilised life. We who are older tremble between our desire for applause and our unconquerable dread of the angers of the critical gods and the gaping pit, and it is for this reason that every bitter-wise adult knows himself to be little

better than a super, a unit of a half-intelligent chorus, who may hope at best to echo with partial accuracy the songs and careless laughter of the divine players. There is something pathetic in the business; for we, too, were once stars, and thought, finely enough, to hold the heavens for ever with our dreams. But now we are glad if the limelight shines by accident for a moment on our faces, or if the stage-manager gives us but one individual line: We feel, for all the sad fragrance of our old programmes and newspaper-cuttings, that it is a privilege to play a part in the pageant at all. The game is with the children; but if we are wise, there is still somewhere at the back of the stage a place where each one of us can breathe the atmosphere of enchantment and dream the old dreams. No Arcadia is ever wholly lost.

OXFORD AND CAMBRIDGE

WHEN I hear grown-up people discussing the University Boat Race I smile sadly and hold my peace. They may say what they like about the latest Oxford trial, or the average weight per man of the Cambridge crew, but deep in my heart there stays the conviction that they are making a ludicrous mistake in speaking about the Boat Race at all. Once I knew all about it, and even now I think I could put them right if I wished. But what is the use of arguing with persons who, under the absurd pretext of fairness, pretend to find praiseworthy features in both crews? Even the smallest boy knew better than that in the days when the Boat Race was really important. I will not say that there did not exist weaklings even then, who wobbled between Oxford and Cambridge in an endeavour to propitiate

both factions. But they usually suffered the fate of wobblers by having to join one side or the other, while still incurring the scorn of both.

The Boat Race dawned upon us each year as a strange and bewildering element in our social relationships. We would part one night on normal terms, and the morrow would find us wearing strange favours, and regarding our friends of yesterday with open and passionate dislike. For the sake of a morsel of coloured ribbon old friendships would be shattered and brother would meet brother with ingenious expressions of contempt. There was no moderate course in the matter. A boy was either vehemently Cambridge or intolerably Oxford, and it would have been easier to account for the colour of his hair than to explain how he arrived at his choice of a university. Some blind instinct, some subtle influence felt, perhaps, in the dim, far-off nursery days may have determined this weighty choice ; but the whole problem was touched with the mystery that inspired the great classical and modern snowball fights, when little boys would pound

each other almost into a state of unconsciousness for the sake of a theory of education. Our interest in the Boat Race as a boat race was small, and quite untroubled by any knowledge of the respective merits of the crews. But we wore their colours in our buttonholes, and the effect of these badges on our lives was anarchic. We saw blue.

It was my fate to drift, fatally and immutably Cambridge, into a school that had a crushing Oxford majority. In these circumstances, the light-blue ribbon became, for the small and devoted band that upheld the Cambridge tradition of valour, the cause of endless but never conclusive defeats, the symbol of a splendid martyrdom. Try as we might, we found ourselves always in a minority, and, to add to our bitterness, these years of luckless warfare coincided with a series of Cambridge defeats, and we knew ourselves the supporters of a forlorn and discredited cause. And yet, Fate having decreed that we should be Cambridge, we did not falter before our hopeless task of convincing the majority that it was made of baser stuff than we. We would arrive

in the morning with our colours stitched to our coats, and when, overwhelmed by numbers, we lost our dear favours we would retire to a place apart, repair the loss from a secret store of ribbon, and dash once more into the fray. The others might be Oxford when they had a mind to, but we were Cambridge—Cambridge all the time.

Our contests were always fierce, but only once so far as I remember did they become really venomous. Some ingenious Cambridge mind had hit on the idea of protecting his badge with a secret battery of pins, and there ensued a series of real and desperate fights that threatened our clan with physical extinction. The trouble passed as suddenly as it had arisen; a mysterious rumour went round the clans that pins were bad form; and there was a lull while Cambridge treated their black eyes and Oxford put sticking-plaster on their torn fingers. Pleasanter to remember is the famous retort of L—, an utterance so finely dramatic that even to-day I cannot recall it without a thrill. Caught apart from his comrades, he was surrounded by the Oxford rabble, and

robbed of his colours. "You aren't Cambridge now," said one of his assailants, mockingly. "Ah, but the sky is Cambridge!" he replied, and indeed it was. We had our little victories to dull the edge of our defeats.

And yet, probably, we of Cambridge were not altogether sorry when the Boat Race was over, and the business might be forgotten for another eleven months, for we had but little rest while the war of the ribbons was in the air. If we sought to take a quiet walk round the quad, the chance was that a boy, too small perhaps to keep a favour even for a minute, but with a light-blue heart, would run up with tidings of some comrade hardly beset in the cloisters, and the battle must be begun again. These contests were sometimes the cause of temporary friendships, for in the course of the tumult one would find oneself indebted to a year-long enemy for the timely discomfiture of one's opponent, who in his turn might be, normally, one's bosom companion. For no tie was sacred enough to overcome this vernal madness of the Blues. If a fellow was base enough to be Oxford, his presence

in the world was unnecessary, his society tabooed. And, as I have said, even brothers would hang each other's heads for the beauty of the Idea.

Then came a day when age and responsibility changed our views on a good many things, and the Boat Race was not spared. Forgetful of the old triumphs and the old despairs, we preferred to treat ourselves and life in more sober terms, while smiling tolerantly at the little boys playing their rough games beneath our feet. Leaning forward with hands eager to clutch our manhood, we would not for worlds have compromised our new position by taking an interest in such childish trifles as coloured ribbons. So the game went on without us, and the measure of our loss is the measure of the loss of the earth when the spring melts into summer.

To-day I hear persons discussing the Boat Race in railway-carriages, and in face of their dispassionate judgments I ask myself whether they can ever have sung for it and fought for it, and, let it be added, wept for it, as I have done. In truth, I suppose they

98 THE DAY BEFORE YESTERDAY

have ; for boys do not differ widely in these essential things. But these people do not fight ; they do not even wear the ribbon ! While it is open to a man to ignore the Boat Race altogether, I cannot understand his approaching the contest in so miserable a spirit.

HAROLD

I SUPPOSE that every one has made the acquaintance of the subject of this little biography at some time or other, though to others he may not have appeared as he has appeared to me, and, as I know, he has been called by many names. Indeed, when I consider that there have been men and women who have sought his society with a passionate eagerness, it is clear to me that his disguises must be extremely subtle, and that he employs them with a just regard for the personalities of his companions. For while some have found in his society the ultimate splendour of life, for me he has always been wearisome and ridiculously mean.

Of course it may be that I have known him too long, for even as a child I was accustomed to find him at my side, an unwelcome guest who came and went by no law that

my youthful mind could determine. Certainly in those days he was more capricious, and the method of argument by repetition, which he still employs, was only too well calculated to weary and distress a child. But for the rest, the Harold whom I knew then was materially the Harold whom I know now. Conceive a small man so severely afflicted with St. Vitus's dance that his features are hardly definable, endow him with a fondness for clothes of dull colours grievously decorated with spots, and a habit of asking meaningless questions over and over again in an utterly unemotional voice, and you will be able to form a not unfair estimate of the joys of Harold's society. There have been exceptions, however, to the detestable colourlessness of Harold's appearance. I have seen him on occasion dressed in flaming red, like Mephistopheles, and his shrill staccato voice has pierced my head like a corkscrew. But these manifestations have always been brief, and might even be considered enjoyable when compared with the unrestful monotony of Harold's society in general.

Who taught me to call him by the noble name of Harold I do not know, but in my youthful days the man's character was oddly associated with the idea of virtue as expounded in the books I read on Sunday afternoons. That I hated him was, I felt, merely a fitting attribute in one whose instincts were admittedly bad, but I did not allow the consideration to affect my rejoicings when I escaped from his company. Curiously, too, I perceived that the Olympians were with me in this, and since the moral soundness of those improving books was beyond question, I had grave doubts as to their ultimate welfare. But it was always an easy task to detect the Olympians tripping in their own moralities; they had so many.

As time went on, and I grew out of the Sunday books and all that they stood for, I came to believe that I was growing out of Harold too. His appearances became rare, and, from his point of view, a little ineffective. It pleased me to consider with a schoolboy's arrogance that he was little more than a child's nightmare, and that if

a man turned to fight him Harold would vanish. For a while Harold, in his cunning, played up to this idea. He would seek my side timidly, and fly at a word. The long, sleepless nights of childhood and the weary days were forgotten, and I made of him a jest. Sometimes I wondered whether he really existed.

And then he came. At first I was only mildly astonished when I found that nothing I could say would make him leave me, but as the hours passed the old hatred asserted itself, and to fight the little man with the dull voice and the cruel spots on his clothes seemed all that there was in life to do. The hours passed into days and nights, and sometimes I was passive in the hope that he might weary, sometimes I shouted answers to his questions—the same answer to the same question—over and over again. I felt, too, that if I could only see his features plainly for a moment he would disappear, and I would stare at him until the sky grew red as my eyes. But I could not see him clearly, and the world became a thing of dull colours, terrible with spots.

By now I was fighting him with a sense of my own fatuity, for I felt that nothing would make this man fight fairly. His voice had fallen to a passionless whisper and the spots on his clothes swelled into obscene blotches and burst like over-ripe fruit. It was then that the chloroform clutched me by the throat. I have never known anything on earth more sweet.

Since then, it seems to me, Harold has never been quite the same. He comes to see me now and again, and sometimes even he lingers by my side. But there is a note of doubt about him that I do not remember to have noticed before—some of his former spirit would seem to be lacking, and I am forced to wonder sometimes whether Harold is not ageing. And, though it may appear strange, the thought inspires me with a certain regret. I do not like the man, and I should be mad to seek him of my own accord, but in fairness I must acknowledge that in a negative way he has contributed to all the pleasures I have enjoyed. Sunsets and roses and the white light of the stars—I owe my appreciation of them all to Harold ;

104 THE DAY BEFORE YESTERDAY

and I know that it is by aid of his keen realism that I have founded the city of my dreams. It will be a grey world when Harold is no more.

ON DIGGING HOLES

WHEN all the world was young and we were young with it there was no occupation more pleasing to our infant minds than the digging of great holes in that placid and maternal earth that endured the trampling of our childish feet with patience, and betrayed no realisation of the extraordinary miracle of life that had set us dancing in the fields and valleys of the world. As repentant children trace with curious finger on their mother's foreheads the lines that they themselves have set there, so we followed the furrows on the forehead of our mother Earth with our little spades, smoothing here and deepening there, and not the less contented that our labours had but a vague and illusory aim. Sometimes, perhaps, we had a half-formed ambition to dig to those dim and incredible Antipodes where children walk

head downwards, clinging to the earth with their feet, like the flies on the playroom ceiling. Sometimes, perhaps, we dug for treasure, immense masses of golden coin, like those memorable hoards described in "Treasure Island" and the "Gold Bug." Or, again, it might be that we planned vast caves and galleries wherein tawny pirates and swart smugglers might carouse, shocking the echoes with blood-curdling oaths, and drinking boiling rum like Quilp. We dug, in fine.

There seems to be some element in the human mind that is definitely attracted by the digging of holes, for it is not only children who are interested by the spectacle. The genial excavators whose duty it is to make havoc of the London streets never fail to draw an attentive and apparently appreciative audience, whether of loafers or philosophers the critic may not lightly determine. They gaze into the pit with countenances of abysmal profundity, that appear to see all, to understand all, and to express nothing in particular. It is possible that they are placidly enjoying the reflection that beneath

the complex contrivances of our civilisation, beneath London itself, the virgin earth lies unturned and unaffected. Perhaps, as each spadefull of earth reaches the surface, they perceive, like a child watching the sawdust trickle from the broken head of a doll, that here is the raw material of which worlds are made. Perhaps they do not think at all; but merely derive a mild satisfaction from watching other people work. Yet it is at least agreeable to believe that they are watchers for the unexpected, that they have discovered the great truth that if you dig long enough you will probably dig something up.

We children knew this very well, and we never dug without feeling the thrill proper to treasure-seekers. Even half a brick becomes eventful when found in these circumstances; and the earth had a hundred pleasant secrets in the shape of fragments of pottery, mysterious lumps of metal and excited insects for those who approached her reverently, trowel in hand. It was this variety of treasure that made us prefer inland digging

108. THE DAY BEFORE YESTERDAY

to those more fashionable 'excavations that are carried on at the seaside. Sand is a friendly substance in which to dig, and it is very convenient to have a supply of water like the sea close at hand when it is necessary to fill a pond or add a touch of realism to a moat. But the ease with which sand obeys the spade soon becomes monotonous, and the seaside in general suffers from an air of having been elaborately prepared for children to play there. Our delving operations in the garden had the charm of nominal illegality, and the brown earth had a hundred moods to thwart and help and enchant us continually. Sometimes we dug with scientific precision; sometimes we set to work with fury, flinging the earth to all sides in our eagerness to rob her of her secrets. A philosopher might have found in us a striking instance of the revolt of civilised man against Nature; a woman would have noticed that we were getting our pinafores dirty.

And though we liked digging for its own sake, we were not unmindful of the possibilities of a good big hole. From its cool

depths we could obtain a new aspect of the sky; and, cunningly roofed over with branches and earth, it made a snug retreat for a harassed brigand and a surprising pitfall for the unwary gardener. In smaller cavities we concealed treasure of stones decked with the colours left behind by the painters at the last spring-cleaning, and if we could not wholly convince ourselves of their intrinsic value, they at least bore adequate resemblance to the treasures of Aladdin's cave, as revealed to us in pantomime. We kept the knowledge of the spots where these treasures were buried a close secret, even from each other, and it was etiquette for the finder of one of these repositories to remove its contents and conceal them elsewhere. The conflict between seeker and finder never languished, and men who rose up millionaires would go to bed paupers.

Like all sincere artists, we did not allow our own efforts to hinder a just appreciation of those of others, and we had the utmost admiration for rabbits, down whose enchanted burrows we would peer long-

ingly, reflecting wisely how fine a home it must be that had so romantic and fascinating an entrance. For us half the charm of "Alice" lay in the natural and sensible means by which she reached her wonderland, though we could never bring ourselves to forgive the author for pretending that his clearly veracious narrative was only a dream. This, we recognised, was an obvious grown-up device for preventing the youthful from slipping away from governesses to wonderlands of their own, and true enough we found rabbit-holes oddly reluctant to admit our small bodies, even though we widened their mouths with our trowels. Looking-glasses, it may be mentioned, proved no less refractory, and at this day, it is said, children find it impossible to emulate the flying feats of "Peter Pan," though they carefully follow the directions. It is clear that these grown-up authors are not wholly straightforward with their youthful readers, but guard the Olympian interests by concealing some essential part of the ritual in these matters. Sooner or later the children find them out, and expel them from

all nurseries, playrooms, gardens, and places where youth and wisdom congregate.

But if we could not tread those long corridors into which the rabbits scuttled so fealty on our approach, there was nothing to hinder us from digging a tunnel to fairyland of our own. The grand project formed, all the forces of the garden would unite, and we would dig seriously for an hour or so. At the end of that time somebody's foot would be hurt by a spade, or some bright spirit would suggest that we should fill the hole with water and call it a lake. Or, perhaps, it would be teatime—at all events, we never got to fairyland at all. Or did we? As we grow old our memories fade, but dimly I seem to remember a garden that was like no garden I have found in grown-up places. It is possible that we did reach fairyland, treading the same road that Alice and Cinderella and Aladdin had trod before us. Perhaps a grown-up writer may be pardoned for forgetting.

REAL CRICKET

I AM willing to leave to other and more skilful hands the pleasure of narrating the joys and trials of county cricket, club cricket, and the splendid cricket of country houses and village greens. Not that my task is the more modest, for, having a just regard for relative values, I think that it is of cricket I write, such cricket as small boys play in dreams (ah, me, those sixes that small boys hit in dreams!); such cricket as the ghosts enjoy at nights at Lord's. It is well for the eye to take pleasure in shining flannels and ivory-white boots; there is a thrill in the science of the game, the swerve of the new red ball, the quick play of the batsmen's feet; but I think that when good cricketers die it is not to such elaborate sport as this that they betake themselves in the happy playing-fields. To mow the astonished

daisies in quick retort to the hardly gentlemanly sneak; to pull like Mr. Jessop because one knows no better; to be bowled by every straight yorker; to slog at full pitches with close-shut eyes; thus and thus only is the cricket of Arcadia.

In its simplest form we played it in the garden after dinner, but even here environment and our imaginations combined to make it complicated. The lawn was small, and there were flower-beds and windows to be considered. The former did not trouble us very much; indeed, we lopped the French lilies with a certain glee, but a broken window was a more serious business, and lofty drives to the off were therefore discouraged. Yet once, I recollect, the ball was sent through the same window three times in an afternoon. Of course, the unfortunate batsman who allowed his enthusiasm thus to outdrive his discretion was out, as also was he who hit the ball into the next garden. But this latter rule was rather conventional than imposed by necessity, for we were fortunate in the possession of a charming neighbour; and sometimes youth, adven-

114 THE DAY BEFORE YESTERDAY

turing in search of cricket-balls, would be regaled with seed-cake and still lemonade, and return rampant to his comrades. But the great zest of our games lay in our impersonation of real famous cricketers. We would take two county sides, and divide the rôles of their members amongst us, so that each of us would represent two or three members of each team. The score-sheets of these matches would convey a strange impression to the erudition of the New Zealander. For the greatest cricketers failed to score frequently, and, indeed, inevitably if they happend to be left-handed bats. So far our passion for accuracy carried us, but, like Tom Sawyer, we had to "lay on" that we bowled left-handed when it was in the part, while realistic impersonations of lightning bowlers were too dangerous to the batsman to be permitted.

¹ These great contests did not pass without minor disagreements. The rights of age were by no means waived, and in those days I was firmly convinced that the F.b.w. rule had been invented by the M.C.C. to assist elder brothers in getting their rights. Moreover,

there was always high argument over the allocation of the parts of the more popular cricketers. My sister, I remember, would retire wrathfully from the game if she were not allowed to be K. J. Key, and so, when Surrey was playing, we had to permit her to be titular captain. Girls are very keen at cricket, but they are not good at it. Or perhaps in the course of the game "W. G." would find it necessary to chase Lockwood all over the field for bowling impudently well. Yet while we mimicked our elders we secretly thought Olympian cricket a poor, unimaginative game without any quarrels. It was thrilling to bat for the honour of Mr. Fry, or to make a fine catch in the long field for Mr. Mason's sake, but our personal idiosyncrasies also had their value.

When we went away for our holidays it was ours to adventure with bat and ball on unaccustomed grounds: meadow cricket was tiresome, for the ball would hide itself in the long grass; and seaside cricket, though exhilarating, was too public a business to be taken really seriously. But cricket in the pinewoods was delightful—almost, I

think, the best cricket of all. The soft needles made an admirable pitch, and we had all the trees for fielders. If you hit the ball against a tree full-pitch, you were out, and it was strange how those patient, silent fieldsmen, who never dropped catches, seemed to arrange themselves, as the game progressed, in the conventional places in the field. Point would be there, and mid-off, and some safe men in the slips. Overhead the birds would call in the trees, and there were queer echoes when you hit the ball hard, as though Pan were watching from some dim pavilion and crying his applause. Really I wonder how we dared, or perhaps it were fitter to wonder why we dare no longer.

The oddest cricket I ever played was with a gardener, a reticent, impassive man, who came and played with me when sudden mumps had exiled me from my holiday-making comrades. He would bowl to me silently for hours, only parting his lips now and again to murmur the name of the stump which he proposed to hit with his next ball, and no efforts of mine could prevent his grim prophecies from being fulfilled. When I gave

him his innings he would pat my widest and most wily balls back to me politely until he thought I was tired, and then he would let me bowl him. This unequal contest was not cricket as I knew it, but it fascinated me nevertheless. At night in my bed I would hit his bowling all over the world and upset his stumps with monotonous ease. By day I could only serve his humour. The devil was in the man.

The bats with which we played were normal save in size, but the balls varied. In times of prosperity we had real leather cricket-balls, but the balls known as "compos" were more common. When new they had a noble appearance, but use made them rough and like dry earth in the hand, and then they were apt to sting the fingers of the unwary cricketer. The most perilous kind of ball of all was the size of a cricket-ball, but made of solid rubber, and deadly alike to batsman and fieldsman. For some reason or other the proper place in which to carry a cricket-ball was the trousers, or rather knickerbockers, pocket. The curious discomfort of this practice lingers in the

mind. Soft balls are of no use in real cricket; but if you bore a hole in them and fill them with water they make very good bombs for practical anarchists.

Later came school cricket, but it is significant that the impression that lingers is of the long drives home in the dusk from out-matches rather than of the cricket itself. We would walk up the hills to rest the horses, playing "touch" and imprisoning unfortunate glow-worms in wooden matchboxes. And later still came visits to Lord's and the Oval, when it was my fortune to see some of our old heroes in the flesh. Certainly they made more runs than they had been wont to do in the past, but — It is not wise to examine our heroes too closely, though I am not alone in thinking that first-class cricketers are lacking a little in the old spirit. Indeed, how can they hope to keep it, they who are grown so wise?

THE BOY IN THE GARDEN

THERE were two kinds of gardening to employ our sunny hours—the one concerned with the vast tracts of the Olympians, the other with the cultivation of those intimate patches of earth known as “the children’s gardens,” wherein was waged an endless contest between Nature and our views of what a garden should be. Of the joys of this nobler order of tillage I have written elsewhere, and I may not penetrate now into that mysterious world beyond the shrubbery, where plants assumed the proportions of mammoth trees, and beds of mustard-and-cress took the imaginative eye of youth as boundless prairies. But if the conventional aims of grown-up gardening set limits to our fancy, if their ideal of beauty in the garden—unfriendly as it was to cricket and the fiercer outbreaks of Indians—was none

of ours, we found, nevertheless, certain details in the process by which they sought to attain their illusory ends stimulating and wholly delightful. Flowers might inspire in us no more than a rare and short-lived curiosity, but the watering-pot (and even better the garden-hose) were our very good friends. Tidiness was no merit in the garden of our dreams, but our song of joy rose straight to heaven with the smoke of bonfires. Meadows were more to our taste than the prim culture of lawns, but in our hands the lawn-mower became a flaming chariot, and we who drove it as unscorched Phaetons praised for the zest with which we pursued our pleasure by all Olympus.

It was one of the charms of childhood that such praise would sometimes fall from the lips of our rulers as suddenly and as mysteriously as their censure. It was pleasant, after a gorgeous afternoon spent in extinguishing imaginary conflagrations with the garden hose to be congratulated on the industry with which we had watered the flowers. It was pleasant to be rewarded with chocolates from France for burning

witches on the rubbish-heap behind the greenhouse. As a matter of fact, we never "helped" the gardener unless it suited us, and we would have hidden in the shrubbery a whole day rather than be entrapped into half an hour's weeding—an occupation which we regarded in the light of a severe punishment. And the odd confusion in the grown-up mind between right and wrong never ceased to intrigue us. When my elder brother, in a sentimental hour, flung a wreath of roses on to the stately head of the aunt of the moment, we knew that it was a pretty thought, very happily translated into action; but the Olympians treated it as a crime. Yet it was not his fault that the thorns tore her hair; had there been any thornless roses he would probably have used them. And, being honest, we wondered no less when we were praised for playing with the garden-hose, that coiled about our legs like wet snakes, and made our stockings wet on the warmest summer day; for in our hearts we knew that into any occupation so pleasant must surely enter the elements of crime. But the rulers of our destiny

would bid us change our wet clothes with a calm brow, and would congratulate each other on our interest in the garden. We lived in a strange world.

The judgments of the gardener we could better understand, though, alas! we had to sum him up as unreliable. He was a twisted little man who had been to sea in his youth, and we knew that he had been a pirate because he had a red face, an enormous clasp-knife, and knew how to make every imaginable kind of knot. Moreover, there was a small barrel in the tool-house that had manifestly held gunpowder once upon a time. Such evidence as this was not to be refuted, but we had to conclude that he had been driven from the High Seas in disgrace, for he was pitifully lacking in the right pirate spirit. No pirate, we felt, would have taken the tale of our petty misdeeds to the Olympian courts for settlement, yet this is what Esau did under cover of a duplicity that aggravated the offence. In one and the same hour he would expound to us the intricacies of the Chinese knot with many friendly and sensible observations,

and tell the shocked Olympians that we had thrown his rose-sticks all over the garden in the manner of javelins. Captain Shark, of the barque *Rapacious*, would not have acted like this, if it was conceivable that that sinister hero could have turned gardener. Perhaps he would have smitten us sorely with the Dutch hoe, or scalped us with his pruning-knife by means of a neat twist learnt in Western America, but whatever form his revenge might have assumed he would have scorned to betray us to the people who had forgotten how to play. Esau was a sad knave.

And, unlike the Olympians, he had no illusions as to the value of our labours in the garden, treating our generous assistance with the scantiest gratitude, and crediting our enthusiasm with the greater part of Nature's shortcomings. Whenever our horticultural efforts became at all spirited he would start up suddenly from behind a hedge and admonish us as the boy in "Prunella" admonishes the birds. He would not allow us to irrigate the flower-beds by means of a system of canals; he checked, or at least

attempted to check, our consumption of fruit, deliciously unripe (has any one noticed that an unripe greengage eaten fresh from the tree is a gladder thing than any ripe fruit ?); he would not let us play at executions with the scythe, or at avalanches with the garden-roller. The mau's soul was a cabbage, and I fear that he regarded us as a tiresome kind of vermin that he might not destroy.

Nevertheless, as the Olympians liked to see us employed in the garden, he could not wholly refuse our proffered aid, and he would watch our adventures with the garden-hose and the lawn-mower, with his piratical features incarnadined, as it were, by the light of his lurid past. Naturally, water being a good friend of children, to water the garden was the most popular task of all, and as I was the youngest brother it was but rarely that I was privileged to experience that rare delight. To feel the cool rush of the water through fingers hot with play and the comfortable trickle down one's sleeve, to smite a plant with maddy destruction and to hear the cheerful sound made

by the torrent in falling on to the soaked lawn—these and their fellow-emotions may not be those of adult gardeners, but they are not to be despised. But as I have said, they were not for me, and usually I had to be content with mowing the lawn, an occupation from which I drew a full measure of placid enjoyment.

Age dims our realisation of the emotional significance of our own actions, and it is only by an effort of memory that I can arrive at the philosophy of the contented mower of lawns. I suppose that professional gardeners find the labour monotonous, lacking both the artistic interest of such work as pruning and the scientific subtleties of cucumber-growing; but youth has the precious faculty of finding the extraordinary in the commonplace, and I had only to drag the lawn-mower from its rugged bed among the forks and spades in the tool-house, to embark on a sea of intricate and diverse adventure.

The very appearance of the thing was cheery and companionable, with its hands outstretched to welcome mine, and its coat

of green more vivid than any lawn. To seize hold of its smooth handles was like shaking hands with an old friend, and as it rattled over the gravel path it chattered to me in the gruff tones of a genial uncle. Once on the smooth lawn its voice thrilled to song, tremulous and appealing, and filled with the throbbing of great wings. Even now I know no sound that cries of the summer so poignantly as the intermittent song of the lawn-mower heard far off through sunny gardens. And cheered by that song I might drive my chariot, or it might be my plough, where I would. Not for me the stiff brocaded pattern beloved of Esau; I made curves, skirting the shadows of the tall poplars or cutting the lawn into islands and lagoons. Over the grass-box—or the nose-bag, as we called it—the grass danced like a mist of green flies, and I beheaded the daisies with the zest of a Caligula, pausing sometimes to marvel at those modest blossoms that survived my passage. I marvelled, too, with the cold inhumanity of youth, at the injudicious earthworms that tried to stay my progress, and perished for

their pains. Sometimes a stray pebble would grate unpleasantly on the blades and waken my lulled senses with a jerk; sometimes I would drive too close to a flower-bed, and munched fragments of pansies and wallflowers would glow amongst the grass in the grass-box:

No doubt a part of my enjoyment lay in the feeding of that natural spirit of destructiveness that present-day Olympians satisfy with frequent gifts of clockwork toys, ingenious mechanisms very proper to be inquired into by young fingers. But there was more in it than that. I liked the smell of the newly cut grass, and I would run my fingers through it and press damp, warm handfuls of it to my face to win the full savour of it. I even liked the more pungent odour of the grass-heap where last week's grass lay drying in the sun. And the effort necessary to drive the worker of wonders across the lawn gave me a pleasant sense of my own sturdiness.

But the fact remains that, with all these reasons, I cannot wholly fathom the true philosophy of lawn-mowing with my adult

mind. I have set down all the joys that I remember, but some significant fact, some essential note of enchantment, is missing. What did I think about as I pressed to and fro with my lawn-mower? Sometimes, perhaps, I was a ploughman, guiding vast horses along the crests of mountains, and pausing now and again to examine the treasures that my labour had revealed in the earth, leather bags of guineas and jewelled crowns that sparkled through their mask of clay. Sometimes I might be a charioteer driving a team of mad horses round the circus for Nero's pleasure, or a fireman driving a fire-engine scatheless through bewildered streets. But with all I believe that sometimes I was no more than a little boy, mowing the lawn of a sunny garden, loving the task for its own sake, and inspired by no subtler spirit than that which led Esau to cultivate cabbages with dogged enthusiasm. It would not do to condemn that dishonoured pirate because he saw heaven as a kitchen-garden and regarded flowers as the fond toys of the Olympian dotage. He, too, had his illusions; he, too, while he sowed the seed had

visions of an impossible harvest. His ultimate fate eludes my memory, but doubtless he has finished with his husbandry by now. I, too, no longer mow the lawn save when arrayed in fantastic knickerbockers and dream-shod as of yore I trim the grass-plats of sleep with a lawn-mower that sings as birds no longer sing. What the purpose of my youthful labours may have been I do not know. . . . *Parturiunt montes, nascetur ridiculus mus.* Perhaps I was already enrolled in the employment agency of destiny as a writer of idle articles.

CHILDREN AND THE SEA

THE sea, like all very large things, can only be intimately understood by children. If we can conceive a sensible grown-up person looking at the sea for the first time, we feel that he should either yawn or wish to drown himself. But a child would take a sample of it in a bucket, and consider that in all its aspects ; and then it would know that the sea is a great many bucketfuls of water, and further that by an odd freak of destiny this water is not fit to drink. Storms and ships and sand-castles and lighthouses and all the other side-shows would follow later ; but in the meantime the child would have seen the sea in a bucket, as it had previously seen the moon in a looking-glass, so would know all about it. The moon is a variable and interesting kind of lamp ; the sea is buckets and buckets and buckets full

of water. ' I think the stars are holes in a sort of black curtain or ceiling, and the sun is a piece of brightness, except at sunset or in a mist, when it is a whole Dutch cheese. The world is streets and fields and the seaside and our house.

I doubt whether a child has any sense of what I may call the appeal of breadth. If it is confronted with a fine view, it will concentrate its interest on a windmill or a doll's house, and the seaside is no more than a place where one wears no shoes or stockings, and the manufacture of mud pies becomes suddenly licit. The child does not share the torments of the adult Londoner, who feels that there is no room in the world to stretch his arms and legs, and therefore wins a pathetic sense of freedom in seeing the long yellow sands and the green wastes of the sea. Nor is it at all excited by the consideration that there is a lot more sea beyond the horizon ; the extent of its interest in the water is the limit to which it may paddle.

Yet in some dim, strange way the child realises æsthetic values more here than elsewhere. I am quite sure it can see no real

beauty in its normal surroundings. Sunsets and small houses lit for evening, the shining streets after rain, and even flowers and pictures and dolls, are never beautiful to a child in the sense that a story or an idea may be beautiful. But tacitly, for a child has no language to express such things, something of the blueness of the sea seems to seek expression in its eyes, something of the sparkle of the sand seems to be tangled in its hair, something of the sunshine burns in its rounded calves that glow like brown eggs. A child is always a thing of wonder. But on the edge of the sea this wonder deepens until the artificial observer is abashed. A seaside child is no creature to be petted and laughed over; it were as easy to pet the tireless waters, and to laugh over the grave of a little cat; children whom one has known very well indeed in town will find new playing fields by the sea into which it is impossible to follow them. Dorothy weighs five stone four pounds at Maida Vale; at Littlehampton the sea wind blows her along like a feather; she is become a wispy, spiritual thing, a

faint, fair creature a-dance on light feet that would make the fairy-girl of a poet's dream seem clumsy by comparison. She is nearer to us when she paddles. The warm sand creeping up through her toes, the silver thread of coolness about her legs, these things are within our comprehension though they fall no more within our experience. But when she flings herself along the beach with the wild hair and loose limbs and the song of an innocent Bacchante, when she bids the gold sands heave up and support her body, tired with play, when she stoops to gather diamonds and pearls from the shore made wet and smooth by the retreating waves, she is as far from us and our human qualities as a new-awakened butterfly. There have been sea-washed moments when I should not have been astonished if she had flung out a pair of mother-of-pearl wings and stood in the blue sky, like a child saint in a stained-glass window. There have been other moments when she has approached me with a number of impossible questions in wanton parody of her simple London self. Between these two extremes her moods vary

from second to second, and she plays upon them as Pan upon his pipes, and to much the same tune. She loves the long tresses of seaweed and the pink shells like the nails of her own little hands ; and her coloured pail, when she is not the architect of sea-girt palaces, is a treasury of salty wonders. To climb the rough rocks and call them mountains, to drive back the waves with a chiding foot, and to alter the face of Nature with a wooden spade, these were not tasks for the domesticated creature who shares the hearth-rug with the cat at home. But the spirit of the sea has changed Dorothy ; she is now a little more and a little less than child ; and she recognises no comrades but those other nymphs of the sea, who hold the beach with the sparkle of wet feet and careless petticoats, who run hither and thither in search of the big adventure, while their parents and guardians sleep in the sun. It is hard that age should deprive us of so many privileges, and least of all can we spare the glamour of the 'sands of the sea. Yet to the adult mind Brighton 'beach, sprinkled with newspapers and washed by

a sea whose surface is black with smuts, brings little but disgust. We insist on having our fairy-lands clean and end, too often, by finding no fairy-land at all. The sea, after all, is no more than water that may be caught in a bucket ; the sand may glitter on a child's spade, and we who believe that the essential knowledge of the thing is ours are no wiser than the children. For me the sea is a restless and immeasurable waste of greens and blues and greys, and I know that its strength lies in its monotony. It is not the noisy turbulence of storms that moves me to fear, but the dull precision of the tides and the tireless succession of waves. And my impression is no truer than the children's and lends itself less readily to a sympathetic manner of living. I feel that if I could once more hold the ocean in my bucket, if the whole earth might be uprooted by my spade, I should be nearer to a sense of the value of life than I am now. I see the children go trooping by with their calm eyes, not, as is sometimes said, curious, but rather tolerant of life, and I know that for them the universe is merely an aggregate of details,

some agreeable and some stupid, while I must needs depress myself by regarding it as a whole. And this is the proved distinction between juvenile and adult philosophies, if we may be permitted to regard a child's very definite point of view as the effect of a philosophy. Life is a collection of little bits of experience ; the seaside bits are pleasant, and there is nothing more to be said.

ON GOING TO BED

WHEN the winter fires were burning their merriest in the grates, or when the summer sun was melting to crimson shadows down in the western fields, we, pressing our noses on the window-panes in placable discussion of the day's cricket, or dreaming our quiet dreams on the playroom floor, would hear a heart-breaking pronouncement fall tonelessly from the lips of the Olympians: "Come, children, it is time you were in bed!" It needed no more than that to bring our hearts to zero with a run, and set our lips quivering in eloquent but supremely useless protest. Against this decree there was, we knew, no appeal; and we pleaded our hopeless cause rather from habit than from any expectation of success. And even while we uttered passionate expressions of our individual wakefulness, and

vowed our impatience for the coming of that golden age when we should be allowed to sit up all night, we were collecting the honoured toys that shared our beds, in mournful recognition of the inevitable.

It was not that we had any great objection to bed in itself, but that fate always decreed that bed-time should fall in the brightest hour of the day. No matter what internecine conflicts, whether with the Olympians or each other, had rendered the day miserable, when bed-time drew near the air was sweet with the spirit of universal brotherhood, as though in face of our common danger we wished to propitiate the gods by means of our unwonted merit. Feuds were patched up, confiscated property was restored to its rightful owner, and brother hailed brother with a smiling countenance and that genial kind of rudeness that passed with us for politeness. This was the time of day, too, when the more interesting kind of Olympian would make his appearance, uncles—at least, we called them uncles—who could perform conjuring tricks and tell exciting stories, and aunts who kissed us, but had a compensating

virtue in that they had been known to produce unexpected sweets. The house that might have been a gloomy prison of dullness during the long day became, by a sudden magic, entertaining and happily alive. The kitchen was fragrant with the interesting odours that come from the cooking of strange adult viands; the passages were full of strong men who could lift small boys to the ceiling without an effort, and who would sometimes fling sixpences about with prodigal lavishness; the whole place was gay with parcels to be opened, and lively, if incomprehensible, conversation. And ever while we were thrilling to find that our normal environment could prove so amusing, the Olympians would realise our existence in their remote eyries of thought, and would send us, stricken with barren germs of revolt, to our uneventful beds.

On me, as the youngest of the brothers, the nightly shock should have fallen lightly; for I was but newly emancipated from the shameful ordeal of going to bed for an hour in the afternoon, and I could very well remember, though I pretended I had for-

140 THE DAY BEFORE YESTERDAY

gotten, the sensations of that drowsy hour, when the birds sang so loudly outside the window and the sun thrust fingers of dusty gold through the crannies of the blind. I should therefore probably have been reconciled to the common lot, which spelt advancement to me, had I not newly discovered the joy of dreaming those dreams that men have written in books for the delight of the young. The Olympians were funny about books. They gave them to us, or at the least smiled graciously when other people gave them to us, but the moment rarely arrived when they could endure to see us reading, or spoiling our eyes as their dreadful phrase ran. And especially at nightfall, when the shadows crept in from the corners of the room and made the pages of the dullest book exciting, it was inviting an early bed-time to be detected in the act of reading. As sure as the frog was about to turn into a prince or the black enchantress had appeared with her embarrassing christening present, the book would be taken from my hands and I would be threatened with the compulsory wearing of old-maidish spectacles—an end

that would make me an object of derision in the eyes of man. And even if I shut the book of my own accord, and sat nodding before the fire, working out the story in my own fashion with some one I knew very well to play the part of hero, some ruthless adult would accuse me of being "half asleep already," and the veil of illusion would be torn beyond repair.

In winter-time the bedroom would seem cold after the comfortable kingdom of the hearth-rug, and the smell of scented soap was a poor substitute for the friendly fragrance of burning logs. So we would undress as quickly as possible, and lie cuddled up in the chilly bed-clothes, holding our own cold feet in our hands as if they belonged to somebody else. But if it happened that one of us had a bad cold, and there was a fire in the bedroom, we would keep high festival, sitting in solemn palaver round the camp-fire, and toasting our pink toes like Arctic explorers, while the invalid lay in bed crowing over his black-currant tea or hot lemonade. It was pleasant, too, when natural weariness had driven us to

our beds, to lie there and watch the firelight laughing on the walls ; and the invalid, for the time being, was rather a popular person.

In summer-time getting into bed was a far more complex process, for the youth of the night held us wakeful ; and if the weather were warm, bed was an undesirable place as soon as we had exhausted such coolness as lingered in the sheets. Then we would devote ourselves to pillow-fighting, which was, I think, a more humorous sport for elder brothers than for younger, or we would express our firm intention of sleeping all night on the floor under tents made of the bedclothes. The best of this resolution was that it made bed seem so comfortable, when we climbed back after the first fine romance of camping-out had worn off. Thunderstorms we loved with a love not untouched by awe, and we would huddle together at the window, measuring the lightning, appraising the thunder, and listening to the cool thrash of the rain on the garden below.

There were rare nights—nights of great winds—when we would suddenly realise that

fear had entered into the room, and that, after all, we were children in a world of men. Our efforts to talk resulted in tremulous whispers that bred fear rather than allayed it, and though we would not even then admit it, we knew that we were possessed with a great loneliness. Sooner or later some cunning spirit would suggest a pilgrimage to the realms of the Olympians, and treading the warm stair-carpet with our bare feet, we would journey till we heard the comforting sound of their laughter and the even murmur of their conversation. Sometimes we would stay there till we grew sleepy, and the fear passed away, so that we could tiptoe back to bed, wondering a little at ourselves; sometimes the Olympians would discover us, and comfort our timid hearts with rough words and sweet biscuits. In the morning we would pretend that the whole business had been only an adventure, and we were not above bragging of our courage in daring the ire of the grown-up people. But we knew better.

STREET-ORGANS

It is very true, as Mr. Chesterton must have remarked somewhere, that the cult of simplicity is one of the most complex inventions of civilisation. To eat nuts in a meadow when you can eat a beefsteak in a restaurant is neither simple nor primitive ; it is merely perverse, in the same way that the art of Gauguin is perverse. A shepherd-boy piping to his flock in Arcady and a poet playing the penny-whistle in a Soho garret may make the same kind of noise ; but whereas the shepherd-boy knows no better, the poet has to pretend that he knows no better. So I reject scornfully the support of those amateurs who profess to like street-organs because they are the direct descendants of the itinerant ballad-singers of the romantic past ; or because they represent the simple musical tastes of the majority

to-day. I refuse to believe that in appreciating the sound of the complex modern instruments dragged across London by Cockneys disguised as Italians the soul of the primitive man who lurks in some dim oubliette of everybody's consciousness is in any way comforted. I should imagine that that poor prisoner, if civilisation's cruelty has not deprived him of the faculty of hearing, "is best pleased by such barbaric music as the howling of the wind or the sound of railway-engines suffering in the night; and indeed every one must have noticed that sometimes certain sounds unmusical in themselves can arouse the same emotions as the greatest music.

But it is not on this score that street-organs escape our condemnation; their music has certain defects that even distance cannot diminish, and they invariably give us the impression of a man speaking through his nose in a high-pitched voice, without ever pausing to take breath. If, in spite of this, we have a kindness for them, it is because of their association with the gladder moments of childhood. To the adult ear

they bring only desolation and distraction, but to the children the organ-man, with his curly black hair and his glittering earrings, seems to be trailing clouds of glory. For them the barrel-organ combines the merits of Wagner, Beethoven, Strauss, and Debussy, and Orpheus would have to imitate its eloquent strains on his lute if he wished to captivate the hearts of London children.

When I was a child the piano-organ and that terrible variant that reproduces the characteristic stutter of the mandoline with deadly fidelity were hardly dreamed of, but the ordinary barrel-organ and the pre-historic hurdy-gurdy, whose quavering notes suggested senile decay, satisfied our natural craving for melody. It is true that they did not make so much noise as the modern instruments, but in revenge they were almost invariably accompanied by a monkey in a little red coat or a performing bear. I always had a secret desire to turn the handle of the organ myself; and when—too late in life to enjoy the full savour of the feat—I persuaded a wandering musician to let me make the experiment, I was surprised to find

that it is not so easy as it looks to turn the handle without jerking it, and that the arm of the amateur is weary long before the repertoire of the organ is exhausted. It is told of Mascagni that he once taught an organ-man how to play his notorious Intermezzo to the fullest effect ; but I fancy that in professional circles the story would be discredited, for the arm of the practised musician acquires by force of habit a uniform rate of revolution, and in endeavouring to modify that rate he would lose all control over his instrument.

Personally, I do not like hearing excerpts from Italian opera on the street-organs, because that is not the kind of music that children can dance to, and it is, after all, in supplying an orchestra for the ballroom of the street that they best justify their existence. The spectacle of little ragged children dancing to the music of the organ is the prettiest and merriest and saddest thing in the world. In France and Belgium they waltz ; in England they have invented a curious compound of the reel, the gavotte, and the cakewalk. The best dancers in

London are always little Jewesses, and it is worth anybody's while to go to White-chapel at midday to see Miriam dancing on the cobbles of Stoney Lane. There is not, as I once thought, a thwarted enchanter shut up inside street-organs who cries out when the handle turns in the small of his back. But why is it that I feel instinctively that magicians have drooping moustaches and insinuating smiles, if it is not that my mind as a child founded its conception of magicians on itinerant musicians? And they weave powerful spells, strong enough to make these poor little atomies forget their birthright of want and foot it like princesses. Children approach their amusements with a gravity beside which the work of a man's life seems deplorably flippant. A baby toddling round a bandstand is a far more impressive sight than a grown man circumnavigating the world, and children do not smile when they dance—all the laughter is in their feet.

When from time to time "brain-workers" write to the newspapers to suggest that street musicians should be suppressed I feel

that the hour has almost come to start a movement in favour of Votes for Children. It is disgraceful, ladies and gentlemen, that this important section of the community, on whom the whole future of the nation depends, should have no voice in the forming of the nation's laws! This question of street-organs cannot be solved by banishing them to the slums without depriving many children of a legitimate pleasure. For, *sub rosa*, the children of Park Lane—if there are any children in Park Lane—and even the children of “brain-workers,” appreciate the music of street organs quite as much as their humble contemporaries. While father buries his head under the sofa-cushions and composes furious letters to the *Times* in that stuffy hermitage, little noses are pressed against the window-pane, little hands applaud, and little feet beat time on the nursery floor upstairs. This is one of those situations where it is permissible to sympathise with all parties, and unless father can achieve an almost inhuman spirit of tolerance I see no satisfactory solution.

For children must have music; they must

have tunes to think to and laugh to and live to. Funeral marches to the grave are all very well for the elderly and disillusioned, but youth must tread a more lively measure. And this music should come like the sunshine in winter, surprisingly, at no fixed hour, as though it were a natural consequence of life. One of the gladdest things about the organ-man in our childhood was the unexpectedness of his coming. Life would be dragging a little in schoolroom circles, when suddenly we would hear the organ clearing its throat as it were; we would all run to the window to wave our hands to the smiling musician, and shout affectionate messages to his intelligent monkey, who caught our pennies in his little pointed cap. In those days we had all made up our minds that when we grew up we would have an organ and a monkey of our own. I think it is rather a pity that with age we forget these lofty resolutions of our childhood. I have formed a conception of the ideal street-organist that would only be fulfilled by some one who had realised the romance of that calling in their youth.

How often, when the children have been happiest and the dance has been at its gayest, I have seen the organ-man fold music's wings and move on to another pitch in search of pennies ! I should like to think that it is a revolt against this degraded commercialism that inspires the protests of the critics of street music. The itinerant musician who believed in art for art's sake would never move on so long as he had an appreciative audience ; and sometimes, though I am afraid this would be the last straw to the "brain-workers," he would arrive at two o'clock in the morning, and the children, roused from their sleep, would hear Pan piping to his moonlit flocks, and would believe that they were still in the pleasant country of dreams.

A SECRET SOCIETY

Now that the Houndsditch affair has been laid aside by the man in the street and it is once more possible for a bearded Englishman to tread the pavements of London without reproach, I may perhaps venture to give some account of a secret society with which I have been intimately connected, without earning the reputation of a monger of sensations.

Some four or five ~~years~~^{years} ago I met a picturesque journalist who told me that he had once been at pains to worm out the secrets of an anarchist society in London, and had incorporated his discoveries in a volume so marvellous that no editor or publisher would believe it. I only remember one incident of all his wonderful adventures. He was led by an anarchist comrade into a small shop in the Strand, thence into a

cellar, and thence along a series of passages and caverns that ultimately brought him out in Seven Dials! Even Mr. Chesterton's detective-anarchists in the "Man who was Thursday" could not beat this. For my part I shall not try, but shall content myself with a straightforward narration of facts.

I should think it was about last July that I first noticed that the children of my neighbourhood, with whom I have some small acquaintance, were endeavouring to assume a sinister aspect, and were wearing a cryptic button with a marked air of secrecy. When I came out for my morning walk the front garden would be animated with partially concealed children like the park in Mr. Kipling's "Thej," and though I have long realised that suburban front gardens do not lend themselves to the higher horticulture, I felt the natural embarrassment of the man who does not know whether he is expected to expel trespassers or welcome bashful visitors. In the circumstances I affected not to notice that the lilac was murmurous with ill-suppressed laughter and that the laurels were waving tumultuously; but it was

hardly reassuring to discover on my return that a large red cross and the letters T. S. had been chalked on my gate by an unknown hand. For a moment I wondered whether the children had been reading "Sentimental Tommy," for these were the initials and the methods of Mr. Barrie's luckless hero, but the age and genial contempt for scholarship of the investing forces made this unlikely. On the fourth day, finding one of the band momentarily separated from her comrades, I ventured a *coup d'état*. Pointing to the letters on her secret button, I remarked, "I see you belong to the Teapot Society."

"I don't!" she said indignantly; "it's the Terror Society I belong to."

The secret was out, but I thought it wiser to conceal my triumph. Evidently, however, my discovery troubled the band, for next morning I received a *soi-disant* anonymous letter of caution signed in full by all the members. I felt that the moment had arrived for definite action, especially as the cat who honours my house with his presence, and whose summer morning bask-

ing-place is in the front garden, had been much upset by this recurrent invasion of his privacy. I wrote a humble letter to the Society, apologising for my crimes and begging that I might be allowed to become a member, and placed it outside on the path. Five minutes later two very unembarrassed children appeared in my study, and introduced themselves as Captain and Secretary of the Terror Society.

The Captain was very frank with me.

"Of course, we didn't really want to frighten you," she said, "but we had to get you to become a member somehow or other."

"But I'm afraid I'm not much good at conspiracies," I said modestly.

"Oh, that doesn't matter," the Captain answered kindly. "You can be honourable Treasurer. You know we want a lot of things for our house."

I began to see what part I had in the scheme of things. "What are the rules of the Society?" I asked in all innocence, and thereby flung the Secretary into confusion.

"You see, she wrote them out," the Captain

explained, "and she doesn't want you to read them because of the spelling. But they're only make-up rules, so you needn't bother about them. Don't you want to see the house?"

"Captain," I said firmly, "it is my one wish. Lead on!"

"You ought really to be blindfolded," the Captain whispered to me as we went along, "but I used my handkerchief to wrap up some of cook's toffee this morning, and it's rather sticky."

"Don't apologise," I murmured hastily; "I don't mind not being blindfolded a bit. Besides, I'm practically a member, and you mustn't blindfold members; it isn't done."

The Captain seemed relieved. "I knew you would make a good treasurer," she said with cheerful inconsequence. "But, look! there's the house."

The headquarters or club-house of the Terror Society stood beside the allotment gardens at the top of the hill, and may, at some less honourable period of its history, have served as a place for storing tools. In the course of their trespassings the chil-

dren had found it lying empty, and had obtained permission from the landlord to have it for their very own. I have implied that the feminine element was predominant in the Society, and, recalling the wigwams and log huts of my own childhood, the difference between the ideals of boys and girls was sharply brought home to me when I crossed the threshold. The walls were papered with sentimental pictures out of Christmas numbers and literally draped with curtains; there were vases filled with flowers in every corner, and in the middle of this boudoir three of the members were drinking tea. In a sense, perhaps, the girls were to be commended for finding the true romance in domesticity, but I could not help wondering what Captain Shark of the barque *Rapacious*, that faithful friend of my boyhood, would have thought of a Terror Society run on such principles. However, I saw that the eyes of the members were upon me, and I hastened to do my duty as an honourable member. "It's wonderful," I said. "How on earth did you manage to do it all yourselves?"

The children all fell to apportioning the credit—all, that is, save the Captain, who seemed to me a very businesslike fellow.

"You see, Mr. Treasurer," she said, "we want some more of those camp-stools and a lock to keep out burglars, and some knives and forks, and a tin of biscuits and a pail and candles and a candlestick and a clothes-brush and a little bell to ring at dinner-time and a knocker for the door."

Fortunately she paused to take breath.

"My dear Captain," I interrupted quickly, "I have a sovereign in the savings-bank, and if you come with me to-morrow we'll draw it out, and do the best we can with the money. But tell me, am I really a member?"

"Of course you are!"

"Then where's my mysterious button?"

The Captain frowned. "Jessie will have to paint you one, but the ribbon costs a penny."

"That makes twenty shillings and a penny," said the Secretary. "It was indeed a businesslike Society."

The next day the Captain and I did a lot

of miscellaneous shopping, and two days later the button was left at my door by a small boy. Then for a fortnight I heard nothing of the Society or its members, and no sinister invasion of the morning occurred to disturb the far peace in the eyes of my cat. At last I met the Captain in the road, and though she endeavoured to elude me, I succeeded in getting her into a corner. •

“Well, Captain,” I said, “how’s the Terror Society?”

The Captain looked gloomy. “Haven’t you heard?” she said. “The Terror Society is all over.”

“Finished already!” I cried in astonishment. “Why, what have you done with the house?”

“It has been given to another society,” she said without a blush. •

“Another society?”

“Yes, the Horror Society. I am Captain.”

I considered this news for a moment.

“Well, I suppose I’m a member of the new society?” I ventured.

The Captain shook her head sadly. “I’m

so sorry," she said, "but the H. S. has a rule that no grown-ups are admitted!"

That is why, though I myself was a member of the Terror Society, I yet feel myself at liberty to write about it. For as on inquiry I discovered that the ranks of the Horror Society differed in no wise from those of the Terror Society save for the exclusion of the honourable Treasurer, I cannot help feeling that I have been rather badly treated.

.

THE PRICE OF PEACE

I CANNOT remember how old I was when I wrote the thrilling poem about the tiger who swallowed the horse, nor am I quite certain that it was my first literary effort, but I know that I was still at the tight knickerbocker stage, and that my previous poems, if there had been any, had remained secrets of my own. It was due to a cousin that my conspiracy against the world of common sense was finally discovered. Woman-like, she tickled my ears with flattery, and persuaded me to let her read the precious document; and then, as soon as she had it in her hand, she fled to the camp of the Olympians, leaving me alone in the little dark room to reflect on the guiles of the sex. With straining ears I waited for the distant chorus of mocking laughter that would announce my failure, while my body

tingled all over with shame. Yet beneath my fear I was conscious that I had not been wholly unwilling to be betrayed. It seemed to me that if I proved to be a great poet, my future traffic with the Olympians might be of a more agreeable character than it had been previously. On the other hand, I felt that life would be impossible if they greeted my poem with scorn. Conceived and perfected in solitude, it had become an intimate part of myself, and I turned dark thoughts to the purple berries that grew in the shrubbery, and provided us with wholly innocuous poison for our arrows. Even then, it would seem, I had an instinctive knowledge of the tragedy of failing as a poet.

And then, while I yet waited in suspense, I heard the sound of footsteps and knew that my cousin was returning. In a flash I realised how stupid I had been to remain in the room, when I might have hidden myself in some far corner of the attic and appeared no more until my shame had been forgotten. My legs trembled in sudden panic, and it seemed to me that my face was ticking like a clock. I received my first

critic with my head buried in the cushions of the sofa.

Looking back, I perceive that the Olympians rose to the occasion, but at the time I could hardly believe my good-fortune. Long after my cousin had gone away I lay on the sofa turning over the pleasant message in my mind—and the magic half-crown in my hand. Praise I had desired, if not expected; but that the Olympians—whose function in life was to divert our tips into a savings-bank account that meant nothing to us, that these stern financiers should give me a whole half-crown in one sum, unhindered by any restrictions in the spending, was incredible. Yet I could feel its rough edge in the dark; and considering its source, I formed an erroneous idea of the influence of the arts on the minds of sane grown-up people, from which even now I am not wholly delivered.

After a while, with a mind strangely confused between pride and modesty, I stole into the room where the others were sitting. But with a quick sense of disappointment I saw that I need not have concerned

myself at all with the proper attitude for a young poet to adopt. The Olympians, engaged in one of their meaningless discussions, did not notice my entrance, and only my brothers were interested when I crept silently into their midst.

"What are you going to spend it on?" they whispered.

Oddly, for I was the youngest of four, this success of mine was responsible for a literary outburst in our normally uncultured schoolroom, and one of the fruits of that intellectual disturbance, in the shape of a manuscript magazine, lies before me. It contains an editorial address to the "friendly reader," two short stories full of murders, a quantity of didactic verse, and the first instalment of a serial, which commences gravely: "My father was a bootmaker of considerable richness." Of literary achievement or even promise it would be hard to find a trace in these yellowing pages, but there is an enthusiasm behind every line of them that the critic would seek in vain in modern journalism. Indeed, those were the days in which to write, when paper and

pencil and, half an hour never failed to produce a masterpiece, and the finished work invariably thrilled the artist with "outlandish pride." I cannot recall that any further half-crowns rewarded our efforts, and possibly that is the reason why three of the four boys who wrote that magazine are now regenerate and write no more.

And even the fourth must own to having lost that fine, careless trick of throwing off masterpieces, and to regretting, in moments of depression, the generous Olympian impulse that enabled him to barter his birth-right of common sense for a silver coin with a rough edge. And the Olympians—they, too, have regretted it, I suppose, for the goddess of letters is an exacting mistress, and we do not willingly see our children engaging in her irregular service. Yet I do not see what else they could have done at the time.

A little while ago I discovered a small girl, to whom I act as a kind of illegal uncle, in the throes of lyrical composition. With soft words and flattering phrases, borrowed, perhaps, from the cousin of the past, I won the paper from her grasp. It was like all

the poetry that children have ever written, and I was preparing to banter the young author when I saw that she was regarding me with curious intentness, and that her face turned red and white by turns. Even if my intentions had been honourable I could not have disregarded her signs of distress. "I think it's very nice indeed," I said; "I'll give you half a crown for it."

As her fingers closed on the coin I felt inclined to raise a shout of triumph. For now that I had paid the half-crown back I should be able gradually—for, of course, the habit of years is not broken in a minute—to stop writing. My only fear is that my conscience may have gone to sleep in my long years of aloofness from simplicity; for though I already detect a note of vagueness in the eyes of my niece, and her mother complains that she is becoming untidy, I hold my peace, and offer no explanation. For I feel sure that if I did I should recover my half-crown.

ON CHILDREN'S GARDENS

IN the well-ordered garden of every well-ordered house—that is, every house that numbers children in its treasury—there lies, screened perhaps by some inconvenient shrubbery but none the less patent to the stars and the winds and the polite visitor, a tormented patch of earth where sway in dubious security of tenure a number of sickly plants. For days they have lain parched and neglected in the summer sun; for days they have been beaten down into a morass by torrents poured from an excited watering-pot; their roots have regarded heaven for no less a period than their heads; and in the face of such unnatural conditions Ceres, one fancies, must have fallen back in confusion and left them to struggle on as best they can unaided. It is only the most hardy

of plants that may survive the attentions of a youthful gardener, and it is a tribute to Nature's obstinacy that any survive at all. I have in my mind a garden of this kind, and thereby hangs one of those rather tragic stories which grown-up people are apt to consider funny. The garden lay below an old brick wall, which must, I think, have faced south, for, as I remember it, it was always lit by the sun. It was the property of three children, and their separate estates were carefully marked off by decorative walls of shells and freakish pebbles. Here, early and late, two of the children waged a gallant war against Nature, thwarting and checking her with a hundred delicate attentions; but on the third had fallen that pleasant mood when it is nicer to lie in the shade and to dream of wine than to labour in the vineyard. His garden was a tangle of weeds and of healthy, neglected plants, and when the inevitable awakening came he saw that it would require days of unprofitable work to turn the wilderness into a proper garden. Yet to hear the uninformed comparisons of visitors was a shameful ordeal not to be

borne. He solved the problem, I still think, in a very spirited manner. He cleared the garden by the simple process of removing plants and weeds alike, and sowed the ground with seeds, purchased alas ! with a shilling extracted quite illegally from his money-box. But the secrecy of these movements had not escaped the notice of the Olympians, and later there fell on his horrified ears an entirely new and obviously truthful theory of botany ; it seemed that the word " thief " could be plainly deciphered on the flowers of dishonest gardeners. There were no blossoms in that little boy's garden that year. Like the monk in Browning's poem, he pinched off all the buds, before the sun was up.

They were simple flowers we sought to cultivate in those days, simple flowers with beautiful names. Violets and snowdrops, the reticent but cheerful pansy, otherwise known as " three faces under a hood," love-lies-bleeding, wallflowers, stocks, and London pride, or " none so pretty " ; of these and their unaffected comrades we made our gardens. Spades and pickaxes were denied us, but the

170 THE DAY BEFORE YESTERDAY

simple gardening tools were ours, and he has lived in darkness who has not experienced the keen joy of smacking the earth with the convex side of a trowel. My hands tingle when I remember how sore weeding made the finger-tips, and there is something in the last ecstatic chuckle of a watering-pot as it runs dry that lingers in the ear. I am aware that there are persons of mature years who can find pleasure in the performance of simple garden tasks. But I am afraid that subconsciously it is the æsthetic aspect of flowers that attracts them, and that their gardening is only a means to an end. No such charge could be brought against our efforts. We cared little about flowers or results of any sort; we *only* wanted to garden, and it troubled us not at all that the labours of one day destroyed those of the day before. To dig a deep hole and to fill it with water when completed is, as far as I have observed, no part of the ordinary gardener's daily work, but it was our favourite effort, and a share in the construction of these ornamental waters was the greatest favour that we could grant to a

friend. There were always captivating insects with numerous and casual legs to be discovered in the digging, and great stones that parted from the earth as reluctantly as nuggets. And when we had hollowed a cup in the earth we would pour in the sea and set our hearts floating upon its surface in paper ships. The sides of the hole would crumble down into the water like real cliffs, and every little fall would send a real wave sparkling across the surface of the ocean. Then there were bays to be cut and canals, and soundings to be taken with pieces of knotted string weighted with stones. Water has been the friend of children ever since Moses floated in his little ark of rushes to the feet of Pharaoh's daughter.

I question whether they know very much about this sort of gardening at Kew, a place which is, however, beloved of children for the sake of the excellent spiral staircases in the palm-houses. But every sensible child has the art at its finger-tips, and in the time that we take to reach Brighton in a fleet motor they will construct a brand new sea for themselves—a sea with harbours and

172 THE DAY BEFORE YESTERDAY

islands and sunken reefs, a perfect sea of wonder and romance.

If we are prepared to set aside our preconceived ideas as to what a garden ought to be, we must own that the children are not far wrong after all. A garden is only a world in miniature, with prairies of flowers and forests of roses and gravel paths for the wide, dusty roads. When we plant flowers in our garden it is as though we added new territories to our empire, new reds and blues and purples to our treasury of colours. And so when a child has wrought a fine morning's havoc in its little patch of ground it has added it may be an ocean, it may be only a couple of stars to the kingdom of imagination which we may no longer see. It only needs a sunny hour or two, a trowel, and a pair of dirty hands to change a few square yards of earth into a world. And the child may be considered fortunate in being able to express itself perfectly in terms of dust. Our books and pictures cumber the earth, our palaces strike the skies, and yet it is our common tragedy that we have not found expression; while

down the garden behind the lilac-bushes at this very moment Milton may have developed Lycidas into a sticky marsh, and Shakespeare may have compressed Hamlet into a mud-pie. The works of the children end as they begin in dust ; but we cannot pretend that ours are more permanent.

A DISTINGUISHED GUEST

I AM willing to acknowledge that until lately, when I was privileged to entertain a cat under my roof for a fortnight, my knowledge of these noble beings was only academic. I had read what the poets have to say about them—Wordsworth and Swinburne, Cowper and Gray ; I knew that “cat” was the only word in the English language that had a vocative, “puss” ; I knew that Southey mourned that his kitten should ever attain to cathood, that the Egyptians were very fond of cats and that Lord Roberts is not. Then I had seen cats in the street, and admired the spirit with which a homeless cat with no visible means of subsistence would put shame into the heart of a well-fed terrier. Lying awake by night I had heard their barbaric song ringing like a challenge in the ears of civilisation, and had

wondered whether some unknown Strauss might not revolutionise the music of the future by aid of their passionate harmonies. But I had never moved in their society, and therefore I would not understand them. In those days I should probably have thought that the recent message of the Postmaster-General to the Press, to the effect that cats of the old General Post Office had been found comfortable homes, was trivial. And I remember with shame that I watched the malevolent antics of the caricature of a cat that appears in the "Blue Bird" without indignation.

I do not propose to give the events of the fortnight in detail, but rather to summarise them for the benefit of others who, like myself, may be called upon unexpectedly to entertain a feline guest. The name of my visitor was Kim, though I am told that most cats are called William Pitt, after the statesman. He was a short-haired tabby cat, some eighteen months old, and a fine, large fellow for his age. While he was with me he usually wore a white waistcoat, and there was a white mark on his face, as if some

milk had been spilled there when he was a kitten. His eyes were very large and of the colour of stage sunlight, and they haunted me from the moment when I raised the lid of the hamper in which he arrived. They were always significant and always inscrutable, but I could not help staring into them in the hope of discovering their meaning. I think he knew they fascinated me, for he would keep them wide open and full of secrets for hours at a time.

I had been informed that his name was Kim because he was the little friend of all the world, but at the first I found him reticent and of an independent disposition. I had always believed that cats purred when you stroked them, but when I stroked him he would endure it in silence for a minute and then retire to a corner of the room and make an elaborate and, under the circumstances, uncomplimentary toilet. In my inexperience I was afraid that he had taken a dislike to me, but one evening, after he had been with me three days, he climbed into my lap and went to sleep. My pipe was on the mantelpiece, and as Kim weighed

over twelve pounds my legs grew very cramped ; But I knew better than to disturb him, and he slept very comfortably till two in the morning. He repeated this compliment on several occasions, but when I lifted him into my lap he always got off immediately, and made me feel that I had been ill-treating him. His choice of sleeping-places was strange. If I was reading, he waited till I laid the book down on the table and then fell asleep on top of it. When I was writing and he had grown weary of turning his head from side to side to follow the birdlike flight of the pen to the ink-pot, he loved to settle himself down on the wet manuscript and blink drowsily at my embarrassment. Once when I ventured to lift him off he sulked under the table all the afternoon, and I did not repeat the experiment. He seemed to be a very sensitive cat.

Of course he was too old to play with me, but he had famous games by himself with corks and pieces of paper. Sooner or later he would drive these under one of the book-cases, and would sit down and mew plain-

tively until I went and raked them out for him. Then he would get up and walk away as if such toys were beneath his dignity. The one fault I found in his character was this constant emphasis of an inferiority that I was quite willing to confess. A generous cat would have realised that I was trying to do my best, and would have pardoned my hundred errors of judgment. Kim never wearied of putting me in my place, and turned a scornful tail to my heartfelt apologies. When he was dozing in the evening on the hearthrug he was very angry if any one put coals on the fire, even though he had been warned beforehand of what was about to happen. He would look at me with an air of noble reproach and stalk away to the window, where, perched on the back of a window-seat, he would stay for hours, patiently observant of the sounds and smells of the night.

But it was at mealtimes that he made me realise most the strength of his individuality. I had imagined that all cats were fond of milk, but Kim quickly disillusioned me, and it was as the result of a series of experiments

that I discovered that he would only drink new milk raised to a certain temperature, and not then if he thought I was watching him. For the first twenty-four hours after he arrived he would eat nothing, though I tried to tempt him with chicken, sardines, and fillet of sole. Once or twice he gave a little plaintive mew, but for the most part he succeeded in giving me the impression of a brave heart enduring the pangs of a consuming hunger with noble fortitude. At the end of that period, when he had reduced me to despair, he relieved himself and me by stealing a haddock. After that the task of feeding him was comparatively easy. I would prepare him a dinner and pretend to eat it myself with great enjoyment; then I would leave the room as if I had suddenly remembered an appointment. When I returned the plate would be empty—that is, as empty as a cat's dignity will allow him to leave a plate, and a few delicate impressions of Kim's paws on the tablecloth would tell me that all was well. The irritating motive that underlay this graceless mannerism was clear to me. He would not be

beholden to me for so much as a sardine, and he was willing to steal all his meals so long as he could remain independent. I think, too, that it amused him to undermine my moral character by making me deceitful.

Incidentally, a cookery-book for cats is badly needed. Unlike dogs, they are *gourmets* rather than *gourmands*, and their appetites seem to languish if they do not have a continual change of fare. They have subtle palates; Kim liked gorgonzola cheese and curried rabbit, but he would not eat chicken in any form. I found anchovy sauce very useful to make a meal savoury that Kim had not thought palatable enough to steal, and the wise host will hold this condiment in reserve for such occasions. There is no relying on their likes or dislikes; they will eat something with avidity one day and reject it with infinite distaste the next.

On the whole it was a busy fortnight, and it was not without a certain relief that I said farewell to my emotional guest and sent him back to his owner. Designedly, as I believe, he had succeeded in making me painfully self-conscious, so that I could not do

anything without being led to feel that in some way I was sinning against the laws of hospitality. It was pleasant to realise that my life was once more my own, and that I was free from the critical inspection of those significant, inscrutable eyes. I have commented on the independence of his character; it would be unjust if I failed to mention the one exception. One night I was awakened by a soft paw, a paw innocent of all claws, patting me gently on the cheek, and in the dark I was aware of Kim sitting on my pillow. I supposed that he was lonely and put up my hand to stroke him. Then for once in a way the proudest of sentient beings was pleased to drop the mask of his pride and purr loudly and without restraint. In the morning he treated me with exaggerated coldness, but I was not cheated into believing that his friendliness had been a dream. There are possibilities about Kim; and I believe that if he were to stop with me for two years we should come to a very tolerable understanding.

ON PIRATES

OF the nameless classics which were of so much concern to all of us when we were young, the most important were certainly those salt and blustering volumes that told of pirates. It was in vain for kindly relatives to give us books on Nelson and his like; for their craft, beautiful though they might be to the eye, had ever the moralities lurking between decks, and if we met them it was only that we might make their crews walk the plank, and add new stores of guns and treasure to the crimson vessel with the sinister flag which it was our pleasure to command.

And yet the books that gave us this splendid dominion, where are they now? In truth, I cannot say. Examination of recent boys' books has convinced me that

the old spirit is lacking, for if pirates are there, it is only as the hapless victims of horrible British crews with every virtue save that one which youth should cherish most, the revolutionary spirit. Who would be a midshipman when he might be a pirate? Yet all the books would have it so, and even Mr. Kenneth Grahame, who knows everything that is worth knowing, does not always take the right side in such matters. The grown-up books are equally unsatisfactory to the inquiring mind. "Treasure Island," which is sometimes loosely referred to as if it were a horn-book for young pirates, hardly touches the main problems of pirate life at all. Stevenson's consideration for "youth and the fond parent" made him leave out all oaths. No ships are taken, no lovely females captured, nobody walks the plank, and Captain John Silver, for all the maimed strength and masterfulness that Henley suggested to the author, falls lamentably short of what a pirate should be. Captain Teach, of the *Sarah*, in the "Master of Ballantrae," is better, and there were the makings of a very good pirate captain

in the master himself, but this section of the book is too short to supply our requirements. The book must be all pirates. Defoe's "Captain Singleton" repents and is therefore disqualified, and Marryat's "Pirate" is, as Stevenson said, "written in sand with a saltspoon." Mr. Clark Russell, in one of his romances, ingeniously melts a pirate who has been frozen for a couple of centuries into life, but though he promises well at first, his is but a torpid ferocity, and ends, as it began, in words. Nor are the histories of the pirates more satisfying. Captain Johnson's "History of Notorious Pirates" I have not seen, but any one who wishes to lose an illusion can read the trial of William Kidd and a few of his companions in the State trials of the year 1701. The captain of the *Adventure Galley* appears to have done little to merit the name of pirate beyond killing his gunner with a bucket, and the miserable results of his pilferings bear no relationship to the enormous hoard associated with his name in "The Gold Bug" of Poe, though there is certainly a familiar note in finding included among his

captives a number of barrels of sugar-candy, which were divided in shares among the crew, the captain himself having forty shares. The Turkish pirates mentioned in "Purchas" cut a very poor figure. You can read there how four English youths overcame a prize crew of thirteen men who had been put in the ship *Jacob*. In a storm they slew the pirate captain, for with the handle of a pump "they gave him such a palt on the pate as made his brains forsake the possession of his head." They then killed three of the other pirates with "cuttle-axes," and brought the ship safely into Spain, "where they sold the nine Turkes for galley-slaves for a good summe of money, and as I thinke, a great deale more than they were worth." Not thus would the chronicles have described the pirates who fought and caroused with such splendid devotion in my youth. To die beneath the handle of a pump is an unworthy end for a pirate captain. The "History of the Buccaneers of America," written by a brother of Fanny Burney, a book which was the subject of one of Mr. Andrew Lang's

appreciative essays, is nearer the mark, for among other notable fellows' mentioned therein is one François L'Olonnois, who put to death the whole crew of a Spanish ship, ninety men, by beheading them, performing himself the office of executioner. One of the gentlemen in this book turned buccaneer in order to pay his debts, while it is told of another that he shot one of his crew in church for behaving irreverently during Mass. Sir Henry Morgan and Richard Sawkins performed some pretty feats of piracy, but their main energies were concerned in the sacking of towns, and the whole book suffers from an unaccountable prejudice which the author displays against the brave and hard-working villains of whom he writes.

In truth, these real pirates are disappointing men to meet. They are usually lacking in fierceness and in fidelity to the pirate ideals of courage and faithfulness to their comrades, while the fine nobility of character which was never absent from those other pirates is unknown in the historical kind. Few, if any, of them merit the old

Portuguese punishment for pirates, which consisted in hanging them from the yards of their own ship, and setting the latter to drift with the winds and waves without rudder or sails, an example for rogues and a source of considerable danger to honest mariners.

If that were a fitting end for great knaves, the meaner ruffians must be content with the pump-handle and the bucket.

It is hard if our hearts may not go out to those gloomy vessels, with their cargoes of gold and courage and rum, that sail, it seems, the mental seas of youth no more. Were they really bad for us, those sanguinary tussles, those star-lit nights of dissipation? A pinafore would wipe away a deal of blood, and the rum, though we might drink it boiling like Quilp, in no wise lessened our interest in home-made cake. But these regrets are of yesterday, and to-day I must draw what consolation I may from the kindly comment of Mr. Lang: "Alluring as the pirate's profession is, we must not forget that it had a seamy side, and was by no means all rum and pieces-of-

188 THE DAY BEFORE YESTERDAY

eight. And there is something repulsive to a generous nature in roasting men because they will not show you where to steal hogs."

THE FLUTE-PLAYER

HE used to play to me in the magic hour before bedtime, when, in the summer, the red sun threw long shadows across the lawn, and in winter the fire burned brighter and brighter in the hearth. This was the hour when all the interminable squabbles of the schoolroom were forgotten, and even the noisiest of us would hush his voice to listen drowsily to a fairy-tale, or to watch the palaces raise aloft their minarets, and crumble to dull red ash in the heart of the fire. It was then that I would see him sitting astride of the fireguard and puffing out his cheeks over his shining flute. Even in the most thrilling moments of fairy stories, when Cinderella lost her crystal slipper or Sister Ann saw the cloud of dust from the summit of Bluebeard's tower, his shrill melodies would ring in my ears and

quicken my sleepy senses with the desire to hear more of this enchanted music. I knew that it was real magic, but I did not find it strange, because as far as I knew I had heard it all my life. Perhaps he had played to me when I yet lay in my cradle, and watched the night-light winking on the nursery ceiling; but I did not try to remember whether this was so. I was content to accept my strange musician as a fact of my existence, and to feel a sense of loss on the rare evenings when he failed me. I did not know how to dance, but sometimes I would tap my feet on the floor in time to the music, till some one would tell me not to fidget. For no one else would either see him or hear him, which proved that it was real magic, and flattered my sense of possession. It was evident that he came for me alone.

The years passed, and in due course the imaginative graces of my childhood were destroyed by the boys of my own age at school. They compelled me to exchange a hundred star-roofed palaces, three distinct kingdoms of dreams, and my enchanted flute-

player for a threadbare habit of mimicry that left me cold and unprotected from the winds in the large places of life. There was something at once pathetic and ridiculous in our childish efforts to imitate our elders, but as it seemed that our masters and grown-up relatives were in the conspiracy to make us materialistically wise before our time, a boy would have needed a rare force of character to linger with his childhood and refuse to ape the man. So, for a while, I saw my glad musician no more, though sometimes I thought I heard him playing far away, and the child within me was warmed and encouraged even while my new-found manhood was condemning the weakness. I knew now that no man worthy of the name was escorted through life by a fairy flute-player, and that dreamers and wool-gatherers invariably sank to be poets and musicians, persons who wear bowler-hats with frock-coats, have no crease in their trousers, and come to a bad end. Fortunately, all education that is repressive rather than stimulating is only skin-deep, and it was inevitable that sooner or later I should

meet the flute-player again. One Saturday afternoon in high summer I avoided cricket and went for a long walk in the woods, moved by a spirit of revolt against all the traditions and conventions of boy-life; and presently, in a mossy clearing, all splashed and wetted by little pools of sunlight, I found him playing to an audience of two squirrels and a redstart. When he saw me he winked the eye that glittered over his parading fingers, as though he had left me only five minutes before, but I had not listened long before I realised that I must pay the price of my infidelity. It was the old music and the old magic, but try as I might I could not hear it so clearly as I had when I was a child. The continuity of my faith had been broken, and though he was willing to forgive, I myself could not forget those dark years of doubt and denial; and while I often met him in the days that followed, I never won back to the old childish intimacy. I sought his company eagerly and listened passionately to his piping, but I was conscious now that this was a strange thing, and sometimes when he

saw by my eyes that I was moved by wonder rather than by the love of beauty, he would put his flute in his pocket and disappear. The world is an enchanted place only to the incurious and tranquil-minded.

Nevertheless, though like all boys I had been forced to discard my childish dreams before I had really finished with them, the lovely melodies of the flute-player served to enrich my latter years at school with much of the old enchantment. Often enough he would play to me at night during preparation, and I would spend my time in trying to set words to his tunes instead of doing my lessons. It was then that I regretted the lost years that had dulled my ear and prevented me from winning the inmost magic of his song, compared with which my verses seemed but the shadow of a shadow. Yet I saw that he was content with my efforts, and gradually made the discovery that while great achievement is granted to the fortunate, it is the fine effort that justifies a man to himself. What did it matter whether my songs were good or bad? They were the highest expression I could find for the

rapture of beauty that had filled my heart as a child when I had been gifted to see life with clean and truthful eyes. For the songs the flute-player played to me were the great dreams of my childhood, the dreams that a wise man prolongs to the day of his death.

I do not hear him often now, for I have learnt my lesson, and though my hands tremble and my ear deceives me, I am by way of being a flute-player myself. This article, it is clear, is a child's dream, and so have been, and will be, I hope, all the articles I shall ever write. What else should we write about? We have learnt a few long words since we grew up, and a few crimes, but no new virtues. That is why I like to get back to the nursery floor, and play with the old toys and think the old thoughts. We knew intuitively then a number of beautiful truths that circumstance appears to deny now, and we grown men are the poorer in consequence. It is folly to find life ugly when the flute lies within our reach and we can pipe ourselves back to the world of beauty with a song made of an old dream.

As for the flute-player, if I see him no more with wakeful eyes, I know that he is never very far away. Likely enough one of these wintry evenings, in the hour before bedtime, when the fire burns brighter and brighter in the hearth, I shall look up and see him sitting astride of the fireguard and puffing out his cheeks over his shining flute. Not many nights ago I heard some one playing the flute out in the street, and I went down and found a poor fellow blowing his heart out for rare *sous*. There was not much enchantment about him—he had been dismissed from a music-hall orchestra for drinking red wine to excess—but he was a real flute-player, and I could well imagine that such a man might be driven to intemperance by the failure to achieve those “unheard melodies” not to be detected by the sensual ear. To be a bad flute-player must be rather like being a bad poet, a joyous but sadly finite life. He was a sad dog, this earthly musician, and he frankly conceived the ideal state as a kind of communal Bodega where thirsty souls could find peace in satiety. I gave him fivepence to

help him on his way, and left him to make doleful music in the night till he had enough money to supply his crimson dreams. But he ought not to have said that my flute-player was only an amateur.

THE WOOL-GATHERER

WHEN he walked down the streets with his head drooping towards the pavement and his hands thrust deep into the pockets of his overcoat the grown-ups would say, "There goes poor Mr. X. wool-gathering as usual"; and we children used to wonder what he did with all the wool and where he found it to gather. Perhaps he collected it from the thorn-bushes whereon the sheep had scratched themselves, or perhaps, being a magician, he had found a way to shear the flocks that we often saw in the sky on fine and windy days. At all events, for a while his strange calling made us regard him with interest as a man capable of doing dark and mysterious things. Then the grown-ups tried to dispel our illusions by explaining that they only meant that he was absent-minded, a dreamer, an awful warning to young folk

who had their way to make in the world. This admirable moral lesson, like most of their moral lessons, failed because they did not appreciate the subtlety of our minds. We saw that the wool-gatherer did no recognisable work, wore comfortably untidy clothes, walked in the mud as much as he wanted to, and, in fine, lived a life of enviable freedom; and we thought that on the whole when we grew up we should like to be wool-gatherers too. Even the phrase "absent-minded" excited our admiration, for we knew that it would be a fine thing if our thoughts could travel in foreign countries, where there are parrots and monkeys loose in the woods, while our bodies were imprisoned in the schoolroom under the unsympathetic supervision of the governess of the moment. Although we no longer credited him with being a magician, the tardy explanations of the grown-ups had, if anything, increased his glamour. It seemed to us that he must be very wise.

He lived in an old house a little way out of the town, and the house stood in a garden after our own heart. We knew by the

shocked comments of our elders that it had formerly been cut and trimmed like all the other gardens with which we were acquainted, but it was now a perfect wilderness, a delightful place. My brother and I got up early one morning when the dew was on the world and explored it thoroughly. We found a goat in an outhouse and could see the marks in the meadow that had once been a lawn, where he was tethered during the day. The wool-gatherer was evidently in the habit of sitting under a tree that stood at one corner, for the earth was pitted with the holes that had been made by the legs of his chair. Being a wise man, we thought it probable that he conversed with his goat and could understand the answers of that pensive animal, who wagged his beard at us when we peeped shyly into his den. In the long grass by the tree we found a book bound like a school prize lying quite wet with the dew. It was full of cabalistic signs, and we took care to leave it where we found it lest it should be black magic, though now I would support the theory that Mr. X. read his Homer in the original. Taking it

altogether, it was the most sensible garden we had ever seen, with plenty of old fruit-trees, but with none of those silly flower-beds that incommode the careless feet of youth. Our expedition enhanced our opinion of the wool-gatherer's wisdom.

Here at least was a grown-up person who knew how to live in a decent fashion, and when he ambled by us in the market-place, his muddy boots tripping on the cobbles, and the pockets of his green-grey overcoat pulled down by the weight of his hands, our eyes paid him respectful tribute. He really served a useful purpose in our universe, for he showed us that it was possible to grow old without going hopelessly to the bad. Sometimes, considering the sad lives of our elders who did of their own free will all the disagreeable things that we were made to do by force, we had been smitten with the fear that in the course of years we, too, would be afflicted with this melancholy disease. — The wool-gatherer restored our confidence in ourselves. If he could be grown-up without troubling to be tidy or energetic, why, then, so could we ! It amused

us to feel that our affronted rulers were itching to give him a good talking to and to send him off to brush his clothes and his boots; but he was beyond the reach of authority, this splendid man. And one of these days we thought that we, too, would enjoy this delightful condition of freedom, for, like many grown men and women, we did not realise that liberty is a state of mind and not an environment.

We had never seen the inside of his house, but we could imagine what it was like. No doubt he kept his servants in proper order and did not allow them to tidy up, so that his things lay all over the room where he could find them when he wanted them. He had a friendly cat, with whom we were acquainted, so that he would not lack company, and probably on wet days when he could not go out into the garden he had the goat in to play with him. He went to bed when he liked and got up when he liked, and had cake for every meal instead of common bread. A man like that would be quite capable of having a sweetshop in one of the rooms, with a real pair of scales, so that

he could help himself whenever he wanted to. Whenever our own lives grew a little dull we played at being the wool-gatherer, but although he occupied such a large part of our thoughts we never dared to speak to him, because we were afraid of his extraordinary wisdom. This was not our normal reason for avoiding the society of grown-up people.

When one day a funeral passed us in the street, and we were told that it was the wool-gatherer's, we shook our heads sceptically. The coffin was quite new and shiny, and all the horses had their hoofs neatly blacked, and we thought we knew our man better than that. But as day followed day and we met him no more our doubts were overcome, and we knew that he was dead. After a while his will was published in the local newspaper, and the grown-ups were greatly impressed, because it seemed that he had been very rich and had left all his money to hospitals. Secretly we patronised them for their tardy discovery of our man's worth; it had not needed any newspaper to tell us that he was remarkable. But when some

new people took his house and cut down all the bushes and tidied up the garden we were really hurt, and began to realise what we had lost. Where should we play now these hot nights of summer when the hours passed so slowly and we could not sleep? They had made his beautiful wilderness as dull as our own, and our dreams must find a new playground. We never heard what happened to the goat.

Now that I am myself grown-up, though children occasionally flatter me by treating me as an equal, I revert sometimes to our earliest thoughts and wonder what the wool-gatherer did with all his wool. Perhaps he wove it into blankets for the poor dreamless ones of the world. They are many, for it is not so easy to be absent-minded as people think; in the first place, it is necessary to have a mind. It is wrong also to believe that wool-gatherers fill no useful place in life. I have shown how Mr. X., lost in his world of dreams, was yet of real service to us as children, and in the same way I think that we who live the hurried life derive genuine satisfaction from the spectacle of

the dreamers sauntering by. If they serve no other purpose, they are at least milestones by aid of which we can estimate our own speed, and if no one were idle we would win no credit from our marvellous energy. Also they are happy, and the philosopher will always hesitate to condemn the way of life of a man who succeeds in that task. Perhaps we should all be better off gathering wool !

THE PERIL OF THE FAIRIES

It is something to have heard once in a lifetime the ecstatic thrill that glorifies Essex Hall while that intellectual pirate Mr. Bernard Shaw sails out and scuttles a number of little merchant ships of thought that have never hurt anybody. The applause and admiring laughter that punctuate his periods really suggest that Fabianism makes people happy, while the continued prosperity of the group gives the lie to the cynic who reminded me how popular ping-pong was while the craze lasted, and how utterly forgotten it is to-day. But I had to rub my eyes while I stood in the overcrowded room, listening to Puck in Jaeger, more witty, perhaps, than the old Puck, but no less boyishly malicious, and ask myself whether, after all, this was only the old magic in a new form. True, civilisation had perforce

made him larger in order that human beings might appreciate his eloquence, and I saw no traces of wings or magic flowers. But beyond that I recognised the same pitying contempt for mortals, the same arrogant confession of his own faults, the same naïve cunning. And then (perhaps a turn of the voice did it, or some slight slurring of the words) the enchantment passed, the ears of his audience resumed their ordinary dimensions, and I offered mentally two teaspoonfuls of honey to the real Puck, for I saw that he had tricked me into recognising his qualities in the most serious man the twentieth century knows.

Yet, though I found Mr. Shaw to be only a prophet and his fellow-Fabians honest enthusiasts instead of bewitched weavers, I cannot say that the discovery left my mind at ease for the welfare of the fairy kingdom that is so important to every one who has not forgotten it. What if this terrible seriousness were to spread? What if every one were to turn prophet? What if a night should come when never a child in all the Duke of York's Theatre would clap its hands

to keep Tinker Bell alive? At first I wished to reject this frightful end of all our play and laughter and wonder as impossible. Yet sinister stories of children who preferred sewing-machines and working models to dolls and tin soldiers rose in my mind, and it is hardly more than a step from that degree of progress to the case of the child who may find the science of sanitation more interesting than tales of fairies. The possibility should make even the extremists shudder, but it must be remembered that many honest people believe in technical education, and that for that matter practically the whole of the teaching in our schools takes the form of an attack on the stronghold of the imaginative child. It is our barbarous custom to supplant a child's really beautiful theories with the ugly crudities which we call facts, and it is impossible to realise how much humanity loses in the process. As for the fairies, frail little folk at best, how shall they prevail against the criticism of our sulphur and the cunning of our permanganate of potash? Shall we always be able to distinguish them from microbes?

It may be well to pause here and see whither the wise, serious men of to-day are taking us. I suppose they will abolish Will-o'-the-Wisp by draining all the marshes, and their extreme industry will render Puck's kindly household labours ludicrously unnecessary. They will turn their swords against all the bad barons, unjust kings, and spiteful magicians, whose punishment has been hitherto the fairies' special task; and this they will do in blackleg fashion, neither demanding nor receiving their just wages of beauty and immortality. They will scornfully set aside the law, so dear to the younger inhabitants of nurseries, by which it is always the youngest son or the youngest daughter whom the gods delight to honour. They will fill with porridge and deck with flannel underclothing the little flower-girls and crossing-sweepers, whose triumphs set faith in the eyes of babes. With their hard, cruel facts they will completely wreck the fairy civilisation which has taken centuries of dreaming and wondering children to construct. They will brush our fancies away like cobwebs.

A while ago, when I was a little boy, some enemy seeing me admire the stars thought it necessary to tell me exactly what they were ; later, my natural interest in the extraordinary behaviour of the sea led another enemy to place a globe in my hands, and prick the bubble of the universe with ridiculous explanations. So it is that when I regard the heavens I see enormous balls of rotting chemicals, rendered contemptibly small by distance, floating in a thin fluid called space ; so it is that when I look at the sea my mind is occupied with stupid problems about the route of floating bamboos, when I ought to be exalted as one who peers out through the darkness towards the Unknown. Where there were two then, there are to-day twenty kindly persons about every child, eager to prove the things it would like to believe in superstitions, and eager to explain away its miracles in terms of dustcarts and vegetable soup. Our babies are taught to hang out their stockings and to batter in their empty egg-shells, but are reminded at the same moment that these charming rituals are but follies, and that

210 THE DAY BEFORE YESTERDAY

the capital of Scotland is Edinburgh. Youngsters babble Imperialism and Socialism when they ought to be standing on their heads to look at the Antipodes, and their parents commend their common sense. Already, I fear, the wings of many of the fairies are beginning to fade, and Puck capers but mournfully in his lonely haunts.

But fairies, goblins, elves, call them what you will, they are worth having, and that is why I would entreat the wise men who are arranging to-morrow for us to spare them, even though they have forgotten themselves all that the presence of fairies in the world is worth. By all means feed the children and give them Union Jacks, but let their faith in the beautiful be looked to as well. And, finally, to the serious person who says with raised eyebrows, "You can't honestly say you believe in fairies!" I would answer this: In a world which at present is fiercely antagonistic to the belief in any emotion less material than hunger, it is impossible to avoid occasional doubt concerning the existence of anything which it is not possible to eat. But when I am in

the company of those who really do believe I do not fail to hear the echoes of fairy laughter in their speech, and see the flicker of fairy wings reflected in their eyes, and with this knowledge I am content.

DRURY LANE AND THE CHILDREN

WE have noticed that in writing about pantomimes the critics of our contemporaries usually make two rather serious mistakes. The first is the assumption that pantomime is really intended for the amusement of children, and the second (which to a certain extent is implicit in the first) is the conclusion that most pantomimes are unsatisfactory because they fail to provide the children with suitable fare. A glance at any pantomime audience should dispel the first illusion. Even at matinées the children are in the minority, while at night the disproportion is quite startling. To us it seems that the real purpose of modern pantomime is to give conscientious objectors to music-halls an opportunity of witnessing a music-hall entertainment without shame. It follows that, even if the second criticism were just,

it would not be very important ; but though we agree that the average pantomime is far removed from the ideal entertainment for children, it is at all events quite harmless, and contains a number of elements that children like. They appreciate the colour of the pageant, the papier-mâché treasures, the gilt moons and ultramarine sunsets, the jewelled and gilt scenery ; they like the funny clothes and red noses and boisterous horseplay of the low comedians ; they like the “little girls” in short skirts, in whom the sophisticated recognise the tired ladies of the ballet ; they like, in fact, nearly all the things which writers with sentimental views on children think it necessary to condemn. As a general rule they do not care for the love-making or the singing ; after a long experience of pantomimes we are prepared to say that they are right, though our reasons are not perhaps theirs. The singing in pantomimes is nearly always extremely bad, and the fact that the principal boy is always the principal girl makes the love-scenes ridiculous. The wonder is that in an entertainment that

214 THE DAY BEFORE YESTERDAY

must at all costs be made attractive to adults there should be so much that gives genuine pleasure to young people.

From the days of our youth we have always had a kindness for Drury Lane Theatre, and, above all, for Drury Lane pantomime. The theatre has an individual atmosphere, the pantomime is not like the pantomime one sees anywhere else. In order to appreciate the size of the place it is necessary to put on a very small pair of knickerbockers and gaze upwards from the stalls between the chocolates and the ices. It is like looking into the deeps of heaven, though here the gods suck oranges and make cat-calls—those fascinating sounds that our youthful lips would never achieve. Drury Lane is the only theatre that preserves the old glamour. We never enter its doors without thinking of Charles Lamb, and it would hardly astonish us if Mistress Nell Gwynn came to greet us with her basket of China oranges, wearing that famous pair of thick worsted stockings that the little link-boy gave her to save her pretty feet from the chilblains. Outside, the image of Shakespeare

leans on its pedestal, sadly contemplative of the grey roofs of Covent Garden. The porters who carry about bunches of bananas unconsciously reproduce the pictures of Mr. Frank Brangwyn. If Shakespeare ever slips down from his perch to watch a scene or two of the pantomime from the shadows of the auditorium, he must wonder a little at our twentieth-century masques. Like the children, he would probably appreciate the splendid colour and brightness of the spectacle, and, having been an actor himself, he would perhaps pardon the actors' cheerful neglect of the rights of the dramatist. For modern pantomime is a business of strongly contrasted individualities rather than the product of blended and related effort. This is especially true of Drury Lane, whose stage at this season of the year is always crowded with vaudeville Napoleons and musical-comedy Cleopatras. In detail the pantomime is excellent; as an artistic entity it does not exist.

At first sight this seems rather a pity. Given a wonderfully appointed stage, gorgeous mounting, a fine orchestra, and a

number of gifted performers, it is natural to expect that the result should be more than the mere sum of these units. But, as a matter of fact, pantomime is essentially formless. Those critics who clamour for straightforward versions of the old nursery stories would be vastly disappointed if they got what they wanted. The old stories are well enough when told by firelight in the nursery after tea of a winter's evening. But they lack humour, and are not, as a rule, dramatic. ("Bluebeard," of course, 'is a striking exception.). When a story lasting twenty minutes must be expanded to last four hours the story is bound to suffer. When, in addition, all the characters are played by performers whose strength lies in their individuality, it will be 'surprising if any part of the illusion created by the original fable survives at all.

CHILDREN'S DRAMA

At a season of the year when children invade both the stage and the auditorium of many theatres in unwonted numbers it would be at least topical to speculate as to the philosophy of pantomime and the artistic merits and defects of child actors and actresses. But while juvenile mimicry of adult conceptions of drama is entertaining enough, it is more to our purpose to consider the dramatic spirit as it is actually present in children themselves. Pantomimes certainly do not reflect this spirit, and, in spite of the sentimental, but hardly more childish influence of fairy-plays, are still aimed exclusively at adult audiences who grant themselves no other opportunity of appreciating the humours of the music-halls. Probably the ideal children's play would have the colour of pantomime, the atmosphere of

"Peter Pan," the poetry of the "Blue Bird," and, most important of all, a downright melodramatic plot. It is this last that is invariably lacking in entertainments nominally provided for children; it is the first consideration in the entertainments they provide for themselves.

If grown-up people were in the habit, which unfortunately they are not, of meeting together in moments of relaxation and acting little extemporaneous plays, these plays would surely give a first-hand indication of the dramatic situations that interested them. Yet this is what children are always doing, and in terms of play every little boy is a dashing and manly actor and every little girl a beautiful and accomplished actress. From the first glad hour when little brother cries to little sister, "You be Red Riding Hood, and I'll be the wolf and eat you!" the dramatic aspect of life is never absent from the mind of imaginative youth.

In one respect, at all events, these play-dramas of children should meet with the approval of modern dramatic critics. No one can accuse them of losing sight of the

motive of their drama in elaboration of scenery or stage effects. A chair will serve for a beleagured castle, a pirate ship, or Cinderella's coach in turn, and the costumes imitate this Elizabethan simplicity. Nevertheless, it cannot be said that their stage is entirely free from the tyranny of those pernicious conventions that place obstacles in the way of art. The law of primogeniture, always rigidly enforced in nurseries, as Mr. Kenneth Grahame has observed, makes the eldest brother as much of a nuisance as the actor-manager. According to his nature, and the character of the play, he always insists on being either hero or villain, and in the absence of limelight contrives to give himself an exaggerated share both of the action and of the dialogue. Sisters are placid creatures and do not very much mind whether they have anything to do or not as long as they can all be princesses, but it is hard on a younger brother to be compelled to walk the plank, although he has the heart of a pirate chief. And the fact that whatever part he may play the eldest brother must triumph at the end of the last act tends

to stereotype the lines along which the drama develops.

As for the plays themselves, it must be owned that they cover an extraordinary extent of ground, and display a variety that no other repertory theatre can hope to equal. The present writer has seen five children in one afternoon give spirited performances of *Aladdin*, *David and Goliath*, an unnamed drama of pirates, and the famous comedy of teacher and naughty pupils. This last is the standard performance of Elementary School girls all over London, and to the discerning critic displays just those faults of sophistication and over-elaboration to which long runs at our theatres have made us accustomed. The teacher is always too monotonously ill-tempered, the pupils are ill-behaved beyond all discretion; Ibsen, one feels, would have expressed this eternal warfare between youth and authority in subtler terms. Sometimes, however, London children achieve a really startling realism in their games; and the looker-on may derive a considerable knowledge of the mothers from watching the children perform

in some such drama of life as the ever-popular "Shopping on Saturday Night." It may be noted here that children's rhapsodies over dolls and kittens, or, indeed, over anything, are always clever pieces of character-acting. Naturally, children do not rhapsodise, but they soon learn the secret of the art from observation of their elders.

But though in large towns the poorer children may not have escaped the spirit of the age, so that their art hardly raises them from the grey levels of their lives, children in general are eager to find the artistic symbol for their dreams, and allow realism but an accidental share in the expression of their romantic ideals. They do not seek the materials for their dramas in the little comedies and tragedies of nursery or school-room life; they prefer to forget that ordinary everyday happenings have ever wooed them to tributary laughter or tears, and fulfil their destiny as pirates or highwaymen, fairies or forlorn princesses.

•Probably the nearest approach to children's drama that we have on the modern stage is the so-called cloak-and-sword drama.

Children's plays are full of action ; speeches are short and emphatic, and attempts at character-acting are desultory and provocative of laughter in the other members of the company. The fights are always carried out with spirit and enthusiasm. To have seen Captain Shark, that incarnadined pirate, wiping his sword on his pinafore is to have realised that beauty of violence for which Mr. Chesterton pleads so eloquently in the "Napoleon of Notting Hill."

Bearing in mind the nature of the dramas that children play to please themselves, it should be possible to lay down certain rules as to the composition of plays for their entertainment. Working by light of Stevenson's lantern, Mr. Barrie has done good work in "Peter Pan," but he has made tremendous mistakes. The scene on the pirate ship is perfect, a model of what such a scene should be, with plenty of fighting and no burdensome excess of talk. But in a play that is essentially a boys' play Wendy is a mistake. There was no Wendy on Stevenson's island of treasure, and her continual intrusion into the story would not be tolerated

in any nursery. In real life she would either have had to discard her sex and become a member of the band, or else have adopted the honorary rôle of princess and stayed tactfully in the background. The Pirate Chief is very good—so good, in fact, that it looks very like an eldest brother's part, in which case he would have beaten Peter and made him walk the plank. The end, though pleasing to adult minds, is impossible from a childish point of view. The boys would never have left their fun of their own free will. The gong ought to have sounded for tea, or perhaps Mr. Darling could have returned from the City with some mysterious parcels for the children to open. That is how things really happen. To our mind, as we have said above, the greatest fault a play for children can have is the lack of a straightforward plot that allows of plenty of stirring and adventurous action. Children love stories, whether they be make-up stories of their own or real stories told them by some one else. The hero of the play should be the biggest boy acting it; the female characters should have no greater share of

the action than the most rudimentary sense of politeness would allow them, but they may sit in the background, mute but beautiful princesses, as much as they like, and they are permitted to comment on the courage of the hero when occasion offers. Successful scenes should be repeated three or four times till their possibilities had been exhausted. Every now and then, if realism is desired, nurse or governess should look through the door and say, "Children, don't be rough," to which the whole company must reply, "We're only playing!" Once at least in the course of the play one of the smaller members of the company should be smitten into tears, to be comforted by the princesses. The actors should quarrel freely among themselves and throw up their parts every half-hour, but, on the whole, they should all enjoy themselves enormously.

Such an entertainment, we admit, would be intolerable to the sentimental adult; but the criticisms of the children in the audience would be worth hearing.

CHILDHOOD IN RETROSPECT

“In age to wish for youth is full as vain,
As for a youth to turn a child again.”

Denham.

It is to be supposed that there are few men and women, who do not occasionally look back on the days of their childhood with regret. The responsibilities of age are sometimes so pressing, its duties so irksome, that the most contented mind must travel back with envy to a period when responsibilities were not, and duties were merely the simple rules of a pleasing game, the due keeping of which was sure to entail proportionate reward.

And this being so, and the delights of the Golden Age always being kept in the back of our mind, as a favourable contrast to the present state of things, it is hardly sur-

prising that in course of time, the memory of the earlier days of our life is apt to become gilded and resplendent, and very unlike the simple, up and down April existence that was really ours. The dull wet days, the lessons and the tears are all forgotten; it is the sunshine and the laughter and the play that remain. But it by no means follows that such hoarding up of pleasant memories tends to make a man discontented with his lot; it would rather seem that they impart something of their good humour to the mind in which they are stored, so that the sunshine of former jolly days returns to yield an aftermath of more sober joy, and to help to light out our later years with a becoming glow of cheerfulness. And on the other hand you will find that an habitually discontented man will be quite unwilling to own that the days of his youth, at all events, were happy.

There is no doubt that the most natural result of this glorification of our own childhood is a liking for children. Seeing them naughty or good, at work or at play, our minds straightway step back through the

span of years to greet a little one who behaved in just such a way; and the sympathetic understanding thus engendered, shows us the surest way, both to manage children of our own, and to make friends with those of others.

It is impossible to conceive a man, bearing his own childhood in mind, behaving unjustly or unkindly to a child. For seeing that we perceive in every child a more or less distinct reflection of our own child nature, such conduct would be something suicidal. How much of the child is still contained within our mature mind is difficult to judge—some people have much more than others. And it is these people who can peel off their experience and knowledge like an athlete stripping for a race, and who can step out to play not only with the same spirit and excitement, but even with the same mental processes as a child; these are they who can readily obtain admission into the sacred circle of child games, and who can fancy, for just as long as the game lasts, that they are once more wandering in that fairy garden from whose easy paths

of laughter and innocence our aching feet are banished for ever. .

Here, then, is the cure for this nostalgia of childhood, which seizes the best of us from time to time, and causes us to batter vainly at fast-locked nursery doors, or to look sadly at the gaudy toyshops, robbed by the cynical years of their fit halo. When this melancholy falls on us, and we who are respectable forty feel like senile eighty, let us forthwith seek the company of little children, and so elude the fatal black dog. "Sophocles did not blush to play with children." Why should we? And for those who are not fortunate enough to number in their acquaintance children of the right age and humour, here, as the cookery books say, is a tried receipt.

Take a copy of Mr. Barrie's "Little White Bird," together with a large bag of sweets, and sally to the park. The rest depends on your address, but for a shy man a puppy will prove an invaluable aid to the making of acquaintances. And if, as has happened to ourselves, at the end of a delightful afternoon a little lady of some seven years should,

abjuring words, fling her arms round your neck and press an uncommonly sticky pair of lips on a cheek which, till that moment we will suppose better acquainted with the razor, why then, if not sooner, you will have learnt that the whole philosophy of growing old is the increasing pleasure you can take in the society of the young ; this, once determined, a vista of most charming days lies before you, and sorrow for a nursery cupboard that has gone into the Ewigkeit will be forgotten in helping some diminutive neighbour to explore hers.

. Southey was really stating this idea when he wrote in "The Doctor" that "A house is never perfectly furnished for enjoyment, unless there is a child in it rising three years or a kitten rising six weeks," though to our mind the presence of both would be the ideal arrangement, since the kitten would take the place of the puppy previously mentioned, for the child to play with.

If we wish to support age kindly, it is only to be done by surrounding ourselves with youth. And the laughter of children, surely the purest and sweetest of all music,

230 THE DAY BEFORE YESTERDAY

will strike a responsive chord in our breasts, and will enable us to live through the years that wither, in all harmony and contentment.

THE FOLLY OF EDUCATION

OF all the intellectual exercises with which we solace the idle hours that we devote to thought, none is more engaging and at the same time perplexing than that of endeavouring to form a clear conception of the age in which we live. Naturally the difficulty lies, not in lack of materials on which to base an impression—indeed, we are embarrassed by the quantity of evidence that accumulates to our hand—but in the fact that it is hard to see things in true perspective when they are very near to the observer. The yet unborn historians of the present era will doubtless lack much of our knowledge, but they will be able to unravel in the quietude of their studies the tangled threads and stubborn knots that write beneath our fingers with the perpetual changeableness and uneasy animation of life

232 THE DAY BEFORE YESTERDAY

itself. But if it is impossible to write dispassionately of a revolution while men are dying at the barricades and musket-balls are marring the bland uniformity of the wallpaper of the room in which we write, it is always open to the student of life to fall back on impressionism, the form of art that seeks to bludgeon life with a loaded phrase, rather than to woo her to captivity with chosen and honied words. And the brutal method is apt to prove the more efficacious, as with that frail sex that kisses, so I am told, the masculine hand that grants the accolade of femininity in that blessed state of bruiser and bruised that is Nature's highest conception of the relationship of the two sexes. While science greets the corpse with incomprehensible formulæ and the conscientious artist gropes for his note-book of epithets to suit occasions, impressionism stops her dainty nose with her diminutive square of perfumed silk, and the dog is dead indeed.

We are all born impressionists, and it takes the education of years to eradicate the gift from our natures; many people never

lose the habit of regarding life in this queer, straightforward fashion, and go to their graves obstinately convinced that grass is green and the sky is blue in dogged opposition to the scientists, didactic dramatists, eminent divines, philosophers, æsthetic poets, and human beings born blind. Some of these subtle weavers of argument would have us believe that impressionism means just the converse of the sense in which I am using the word; that, for instance, the fact that grass is green comes to us from indirect sources, as that of our own natures we would perceive it to be red or blue. But while we believe our impressions to be our own, we know that this theory has reached us indirectly, so we can well afford to ignore it. Others, again, will have it that impressions are not to be trusted; and the majority of people, while rejecting or failing to comprehend the philosophic basis on which this doubt is founded, are only too willing to accept a theory that relieves them in some way of responsibility for their own individual actions. As a matter of fact, telling a man to mistrust his impressions is

234 THE DAY BEFORE YESTERDAY

like bidding a mariner despise his compass. If our senses lie to us, we must live, perforce, in a world of lies.

But as I hinted above, the young are wont to rely on their impressions from the moment when a baby first parts its lips in howling criticism of life. Children have implicit faith in the evidence of their senses until the grown-up people come along and tell grimy stories of perjured eyes and lying ears, and the unhappy fate of the unwise babes who trusted them. What is a child to do? Usually it accepts the new theory of its own inherent blindness and deafness grudgingly, but it accepts it nevertheless. It begins to rely on the experience of older human beings, as if the miracle of its own life were no more than the toneless repetition of other lives that have been before it. Wonder passes from its life, as joy passes from pencil and paper when the little fingers are made to follow certain predestined lines, instead of tracing the fancies of the moon. The child becomes sensible, obedient, quick at its lessons. It learns the beauty of the world from pictures and the love of its

mother from books. In course of time its senses become atrophied through disuse, and it can, in truth, no longer see or hear. When this stage is reached the education of the individual is completed, and all civilisation's requirements are satisfied.

I have described an extreme case, and the judicious reader will realise that the process is rarely completed in so short a time as the last paragraph suggests. But sooner or later most men and women come to believe in experience, and to this belief is due our tyrannous treatment of the young. I can conceive that an age will come that will shrink with horror from the excesses we commit in the name of education, and will regard us who force children to do their lessons against their will very much in the way in which we regard the slave-owners of the past, only with added indignation that our tyranny is imposed on the children's minds, and not on the bodies of adults. Let those conservative readers who find this comparison a little strained reflect for a moment on what it is that we have to teach the next generation, with what manner of

wisdom we chain the children's imaginations and brand their minds. We teach them in the first place to express themselves in sounds that shall be intelligible to us, and this, I suppose, is necessary, though I should like to doubt it. Further, we invariably instruct them in the sciences of reading and writing, which seems to me frankly unfortunate. In Utopia, as I conceive it, the child who thought there was anything worth reading would teach itself to read, as many children have done before it, and in the same way the rarer child who desired to express itself on paper would teach itself to write. That any useful purpose is served by the general possession of this knowledge I cannot see. Even civilisation cannot rejoice that her children are able to read the Sunday newspapers and scrawl gutter sentiments on the walls of churches.

Beyond this we teach children geography, which robs the earth of its charm of unexpectedness and calls beautiful places by ugly names; history, which chronicles inaccurate accounts of unimportant events in the ears of those who would be better employed in

discovering the possibilities of their own age; arithmetic, which encourages the human mind to set limits to the infinite; botany, which denotes the purposeless vivisection of flowers; chemistry, which is no more than an indelicate unveiling of matter; and a hundred other so-called arts and science, which, when examined without prejudice, will be found to have for their purpose the standardisation and ultimate belittlement of life.

In Utopia, the average human being would not know how to read or write, would have no knowledge of the past, and would know no more about life and the world in general, than he had derived from his own impressions. The sum of those impressions would be the measure of his wisdom, and I think that the chances are that he would be a good deal less ignorant than he is now, when his head is full of confused ideas borrowed from other men and only half-comprehended. I think that our system of education is bad, because it challenges the right of the individual to think constructively for himself. In rustic families, where the father and

mother have never learnt to read and the children have had the advantages of "scholarship," the illiterate generation will always be found to have more intelligence than their educated descendants. The children were learning French and arithmetic when they should have been learning life.

And, after all, this is the only kind of education that counts. We all know that a man's knowledge of Latin or the use of the globes does not affect his good-fellowship, or his happiness, or even the welfare of the State as a whole. What is important is, that he should have passed through certain experiences, felt certain emotions, and dreamed certain dreams, that give his personality the stamp of a definite individual existence. Tomlinson, the book-made man, with his secondhand virtues and secondhand sins, is of no use to any one. Yet while we all realise this, we still continue to have a gentle, unreasoning faith in academic education; we still hold that a man should temper his own impressions with the experience of others.

ON COMMON SENSE

ABOUT this time last year I was fortunate enough to go to a very nice children's party, or, rather, a very nice party for children. I add the appreciative epithet because there was only one grown-up person there, and that person was not I ; and when all is said it may be stated confidently that the fewer the grown-ups the better the children's party. Nevertheless, although there was only one grown-up for about thirty children, and she the most charming and tactful of girls, I had not been long in the place of fairy-lamps before I discovered that, with one exception I was the youngest person there. I had come out that night in the proper party frame of mind. My shoes were tight and my mind was full of riddles of which I had forgotten the answers, and as I drove along in a four-wheeler—who ever went to a party

in anything else?—I noticed that the stars smelt of tangerine oranges. When I reached the house everything looked all right. The place was very busy, and there were lots of white frocks and collars, and pink faces.

Yes, it ought to have been a jolly party, but it came about twenty years too late, and the children, I had almost added, were about twenty years too old. Instead of forgetting everything else in the whirl and clamour of play and dancing, they were, it seemed to me, too busy registering the impressions to enjoy themselves. One of them, a child of eleven, was already smitten with a passion for the *mot juste*. "My tongue," she told me gravely, "is like a cloud"; and, later, "a marigold is like a circus." She had a crushing word for a comrade who was looking at herself in a mirror. "But you don't *really* look as nice as you do in the looking-glass!" The other children did not seem much better, and I stood forlornly in their midst, as a child stands among the creased trouser-legs of its elders, until I saw a scared little face in a corner apart from the rest. "Why aren't you playing?" I asked. The

child looked me straight in the face, and burst into a thousand tears. At least here was something young, something not wholly wise. We sat together, exchanging grave confidences all the evening.

Possibly this is a queer way in which to start an article on common sense, but there is more than madness in my method, for I feel assured that the children have derived their new wisdom—a senseless wisdom, a wisdom of facts—from their absurd parents. The latest creed, the belief that comfort for the masses prevents remorse in the individual, may be well enough in its way, but it creates a very bad atmosphere in which to bring up children. They are taught that life is an agglomeration of facts, and no sort of miracle, and by learning these facts like little parrots they lose the whole thrill and adventure of life. They do not go out to kill dragons, because they know that there are no dragons there. Chivalry survived with children long after common sense had killed it as dead as mutton in the adult mind. But now they, too, have found it out, and there are only a few silly poets and mad

lovers to keep the memory of Quixote green.

What are these facts by which we are to guide our lives, of which, indeed, our lives are to consist? One of the simplest, one that has come to have the force of a proverbial expression, is the fact that two and two make four, and this is one of the first things we teach our children.

I have a friend who suspects, that in moments of intense consciousness two and two, weary of making four, would make five for a change. I have heard it argued against him by mathematicians that the fourness of four—four's very existence, as it were—depends on its being related to two in the subtle fashion suggested by the well-known dogma, but I can discern no grounds for this assertion. Consider the fate that would befall a man who went for a ride on an omnibus for the purpose of making use of this one fact. He might be aware that the fare to Putney was fourpence, and, proud of his mathematical knowledge, might pay his fare in two instalments of twopence. What would be his consternation to find that, as

he reached his journey's end, he would have to pay another penny because he had not paid his fourpence in one lump sum? In terms of 'bus fares, two and two do not make four, and I would multiply examples of such exceptions to the accepted rule.

But even if two and two really did make four, the fact would remain supremely useless. However cunningly it was conveyed, the statement would not abate one tear from the sorrows of a child, nor would it brighten, even for an instant, the eyes of a dying man. You could not win a girl with it, because the man who counts his kisses is damned from the start. A poet could not turn it into song; it would draw no briefest flame from the ashes of a storyteller's fire. The thing is cold, inhuman; it is made for lawyers and politicians, and the persons who argue their lives away on matters of no importance. We who are simpler never put two and two together for the purpose of making four, for four is of no more use to us than a nice brace of twos. The infinite is the answer of all our mathematical problems, and if we cannot find it we are

quick to sponge the sum off our slates. The belief that two and two make four leads most people to think four a better fellow than two ; to hold, for instance, that a man with four millions must be richer than a man with two, though the groans of our pauper millionaires never cease to admonish our national cupidity. Two and two make just what your heart can compass, neither more nor less, and, if your unit is worthless, they make nothing at all.

Facts are worse than useless, for they limit the journeys of the human mind ; but, there is a common sense not founded on facts that represents the extreme limits of our intellectual pilgrimages. It is common only in this : it is true for all humanity when humanity is wise enough to accept it. Shakespeare had it deliciously, and even now we are only beginning to learn the things he knew. For instance—

“We are such stuff as dreams are made of,
And our little life is rounded with a sleep.”

This seems more wisely true to us to-day than it did to the men and women of his

age, but it was as true when he wrote it as it is now. Or again—

“Men must abide
Their going hence even as their coming hither,
Ripeness is all.”

This is the true common sense—all that we know, all that we shall know; but this is not the thing that we teach the children in our schools, nor is it the light by which most of us guide our lives. We invent trivial rules and conventions to belittle the life we have to lead, and make marks in the dust with our fingers to cheat an uncheatable fate. We add illusion to illusion in coward hopes of outliving the greatest illusion of all. We add folly to folly, and lie to lie, and are content that the results of our labours should be un wisdom and untruth. We add two to two and worship the mournful constancy of four.

I began my article on common sense with a children's party; I must end it, I suppose, somewhere within the limits of our unhoping lives. When the night of a hundred kisses draws to a close, and Dawn, with her painted

smile, creeps like a spy into the room, men and women believe that they can see things as they really are. The earth is grey to their eyes, though not more grey than their own tired flesh, and their little hearts are quick to believe that grey is the normal colour of life. The sun comes up and tints the world with rose, and they forget their sorrow, as they have so often forgotten it before; and go their boasting way through the world they believe their own. Around them, in the light that is not the sun's, the shadows tremble—shadows of the dead, shadows of the yet unborn. The wise cannot tell them apart.

THE END

**The Gresham Press,
UNWIN BROTHERS, LIMITED,
WOKING AND LONDON**

